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# THE SPECTATOR

## NHS emergency

Jeremy Hunt is making a catastrophic mistake, says Max Pemberton



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## Pry another day

Were David Cameron in any way adept at spin, it would be tempting to think that the publication of the Investigatory Powers Bill had been deliberately timed so as to coincide with the opening of *Spectre*, the new James Bond film. The debate over the bill has turned into a question of whether we trust our spies, which by and large we do. But the real question to be asked is whether we trust the taxman, the police and our town halls with the powers of espionage — and that is another matter entirely.

The Investigatory Powers Bill does not actually contain new powers for the security services, who can already tap phones and access emails and have done for decades. It's quite true that our spooks are in a technological race with jihadis who use every new app and platform to communicate with each other and assume alternate identities. But our spies have stayed one step ahead and can identify terrorist targets, as attested by the recent RAF drone strike in Syria. They are not asking for more freedom, nor are they getting it.

The last time that Britain passed spying laws was in 2000, with the flawed Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act. Talk at the time was — as ever — about the need for our spies to have proper powers (and this before the 11 September attacks). But before too long, Ripa was being used by nosy council enforcement types and police officers trawling through suspects' computers on a hunch. Ripa didn't reveal the secrets of the Blofelds and Goldfingers so much as those of ordinary law-abiding civilians. Jenny Paton, Tim Joyce and their three children, for instance,

ended up being snooped upon by Poole council, which wrongly suspected they might be fibbing about their address in order to sneak the kids into a better primary school. A tribunal later ruled that Poole council had abused its powers.

'A Question of Trust', David Anderson's report on surveillance powers, which was commissioned by the government to inform the drafting of the new bill, makes all this clear. In spite of being regularly used to justify new snooping powers, suspected terror offences are cited in only 1 per cent of appli-

*If constables and council enforcement officers are allowed to behave like jumped-up spies, they will*

cations to access data. A quarter of applications are for the investigation of drugs offences, 10 per cent are for financial offences and 9 per cent for sexual offences. Many of these cases may, of course, be serious enough to justify accessing communications data. The problem with the new bill, however, is not the powers available, but the lack of sufficient restrictions on how they're used.

It is good that a judge rather than the Home Secretary will in future be required to authorise interception of communications, and that there will be a criminal offence for wilfully or recklessly collecting communications data. But clear limits are lacking. A Dutch court recently threw out a data-retention law because it didn't contain set boundaries and allowed communications data to be used to solve bicycle thefts as well as terrorism. We need a debate like this, to have the limits we agree on enshrined in law.

If constables and council enforcement officers are allowed to behave like jumped-up spies, then they will — spending more time behind computers instead of on the streets. The danger is not just that citizens' privacy will be infringed, but that law enforcement will become skewed towards discovering trivial offences rather than serious crimes. It would be very easy, for example, to use data on our website visits — which the new bill proposes that internet providers should keep for 12 months — to catch people who watch live-streamed television on the internet in spite of not possessing a TV licence. All this would just jam up the courts even more: TV licence-dodgers already take up one in ten cases heard by magistrates.

Before the internet, police had no way of tracing every book we read, reading every letter we received in the post, and overhearing our face-to-face conversations. The internet has provided infinite opportunities for snooping and while the spies have used their powers sparingly, the police have not.

The government says it wants one investigatory powers law which applies across all public authorities, from community police officers to spies. But why? In Canada, there are two privacy laws: one for the spies and the other for the rest of government. There is merit in this approach. The law ought to recognise that security services are involved in a fundamentally different activity than officials concerned with minor offences.

For too long, successive governments have hammered through spying laws while muttering about national security and hoping their alarmism would take the place of serious debate. This time, we must do better.



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Instead of sweating over PMQs,  
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Delicately balanced arrangements  
of forms like fluttering leaves,  
subatomic particles or celestial  
bodies, suspended from the lightest  
possible cat's cradle of wire  
*Martin Gayford, p68*

After defecating on the table,  
Leo now looks at me expectantly,  
hoping for a 'treat'  
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## CONTRIBUTORS

**Christopher Buckley** wrote speeches for Vice President George H.W. Bush. His new novel, *The Relic Master*, is out in December, and his politics column is on p. 12.

**Max Pemberton** is a doctor, and the editor of *Spectator Health*. His cover story is on p. 14.

**Ruth Scurr**'s latest book is *John Aubrey: My Own Life*. She reviews Jonathan Coe's sequel to *What a Carve Up!* on p. 53.

**Roy Foster**'s many books on Ireland include *Luck and the Irish*, *Modern Ireland*, *The Irish Story* and a two-volume life of W.B. Yeats. He considers Eamon de Valera on p. 59.

**Claire Lowdon**'s satirical novel *Left of the Bang* was published earlier this year. She reviews Edna O'Brien on p. 62.



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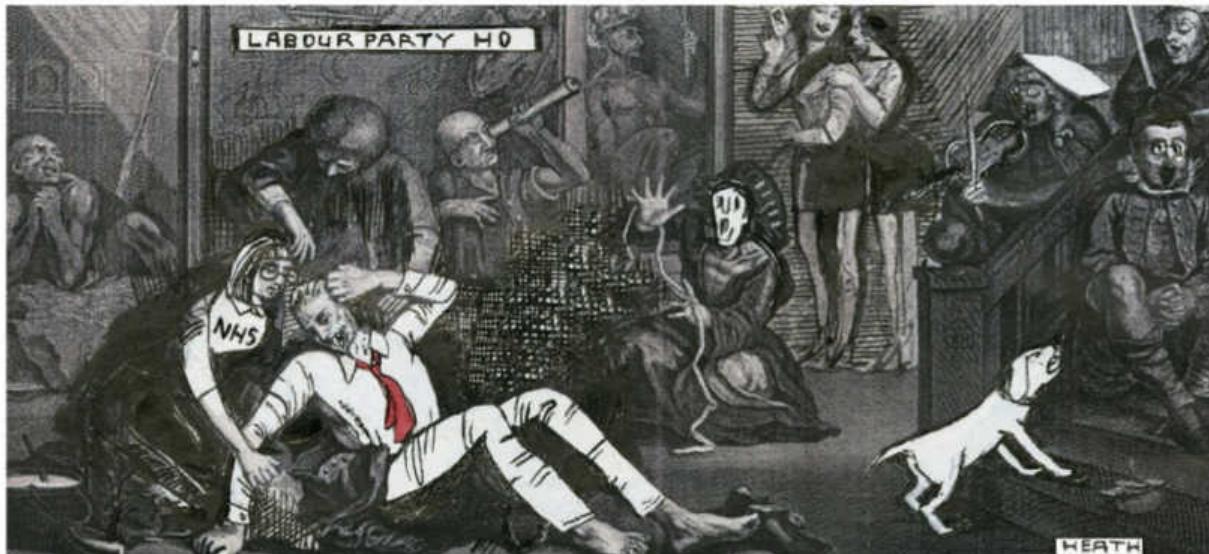
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# PORTRAIT OF THE WEEK



BEDLAM, AFTER HOGARTH

## Home

David Cameron, the Prime Minister, outlined four changes he sought in Britain's membership of the EU. He wanted to protect the single market for Britain and others outside the eurozone; to increase commercial competitiveness; to exempt Britain from an 'ever closer union'; and to restrict EU migrants' access to in-work benefits. Mr Cameron put the demands in a letter to Donald Tusk, the President of the European Council. David Lidington, the Europe minister, said that others in the EU could put forward 'alternative proposals that deliver the same result'. In a speech to the Confederation of British Industry, Mr Cameron had said: 'The argument isn't whether Britain could survive outside the EU; of course it could. The argument is, "How are we going to be best off?"' Mr Cameron flew to Malta for a summit on the migrant crisis.

George Osborne, the Chancellor of the Exchequer, said that the Treasury, and the transport, local government and environment departments had agreed to 30 per cent cuts in spending. Reading jail was among Victorian prisons to be sold for housing and replaced by nine new prisons, to save £80 million a year. Unemployment fell by 103,000 but average earnings rose. Asked on television about Britain's nuclear deterrent, General Sir Nicholas Houghton, the Chief of the Defence Staff, said: 'If a prime minister said they would never press the nuclear button, the deterrent is then completely undermined.' Jeremy Corbyn, the leader of the opposition, accused Sir Nicholas of having 'intervened directly in

issues of political dispute'. Pat Eddery, the 11-times flat racing champion jockey, died aged 63.

A 66-year-old former member of the Parachute Regiment was arrested in Co Antrim by the 'Legacy Investigation Branch' of the Police Service of Northern Ireland investigating the events of Bloody Sunday in Londonderry in 1972. The government dropped a Commons vote on a Bill to grant councils and mayors in England and Wales powers to set Sunday trading laws in their areas after opposition from 20 Tory MPs and from Scottish nationalist MPs. Asda said it would not take part in pre-Christmas sales on so-called Black Friday.

## Abroad

Russia should be banned from athletics, including the 2016 Olympics, the World Anti-Doping Agency commission said after it published a report finding that Russia ran a 'state-supported' doping programme. The report also alleged that Lamine Diack, the former head of the International Association of Athletics Federations, took payments for deferring sanctions against Russian drugs cheats. Interpol said it would co-ordinate a French-led global investigation into the doping allegations. Budi Waseso, the head of Indonesia's anti-drugs agency, said he would seek out the fiercest crocodiles to guard a prison island for drug convicts on death-row; 'You can't bribe crocodiles,' he said. A Chinese collector bought a Modigliani reclining nude for £113 million.

Syrian government forces were reported to have broken a two-year siege of

Kuwaitis airbase, east of Aleppo, by the Islamic State. Syrian refugees registered in neighbouring countries rose to 2,181,293 in Turkey, 1,078,338 in Lebanon and 630,776 in Jordan. Slovenia constructed border barriers except at crossing-points as 30,000 migrants approached. Angela Merkel, the Chancellor of Germany, reversed a decision taken behind her back by Thomas de Maizière, the interior minister, which had reduced the status of migrants coming from Syria to that of temporary asylum. Helmut Schmidt, who, as the Chancellor of West Germany from 1974 to 1982, was an architect of the European Monetary System, died aged 96. The European Court of Auditors in a report on the 2014 budget said that the EU needed a 'wholly new approach' to investment and spending. A European Commission report on Turkish prospects for EU membership found 'an overall negative trend in the respect for the rule of law', not to mention 'a severe deterioration of its security situation', a reference to the hundreds killed in fighting between Turkish security forces and the Kurdish PKK in the east of the country.

In Burma, the National League for Democracy, led by Aung San Suu Kyi, won a majority in the elections, even though a quarter of seats are set aside for the army. Chad declared a state of emergency in the Lake Chad region after attacks by Boko Haram militants from Nigeria. Severe drought meant that more than 15 million people in Ethiopia would be in need of food aid by the beginning of 2016, the UN warned. A man riding a supermarket trolley at 50mph down a hill in Sydney died in a collision with a car.

CSH.

# Mind your Q's & A's

Dispatches

Britain's Nightmare New Homes  
Monday 8pm



# DIARY

## Harriet Harman

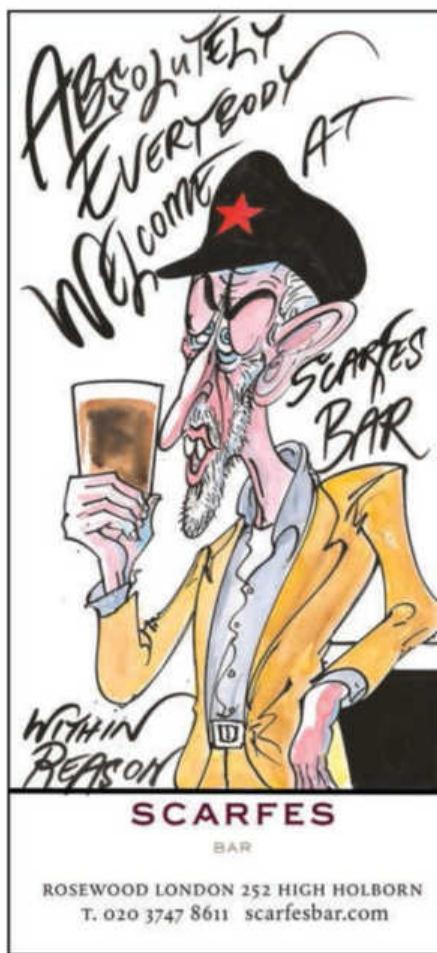
One of my constituents has been in an Indonesian prison since May. Journalist Rebecca Prosser was arrested with her colleague Neil Bonner while working on a documentary for *National Geographic* about piracy in the Malaccan Strait. Their visas hadn't come through when filming started and they were arrested by the Indonesian navy and locked up in a prison with 1,400 men and 30 women. The family had been warned that publicity would only make things worse so I have been working behind the scenes to try to get her home. I've been ambushing Philip Hammond and Hugo Swire as they come out of the division lobby after 10 p.m. votes, urging them to get our embassy in Jakarta to visit the prison, and leaping on Richard Graham MP, chair of the all-party parliamentary group on Indonesia. After six months of worry, an email from Rebecca's sister arrives. The court has found them guilty, but with the time they've already served, and a fine paid, they can come home. Great news and huge relief all round.

To King's College Hospital to meet some of the junior doctors. Every few seconds bleepers and phones go off and the doctors dash out on urgent calls. How different from my usual meetings there with the management, when it's tea and biscuits and a rigid agenda. The junior doctors, in their late thirties with stethoscopes around their necks, are passionate about the NHS, their medical research, and, most of all, the care they give their patients. There was a psychiatrist, an anaesthetist, a geriatrician, a paediatrician and a number of acute medics. They are seriously brainy, committed professionals and we should all be falling down in gratitude to them — their long years of study, professionalism and downright stamina! With Australia and pharmaceutical companies trying to lure them away, it's mad to be cutting their pay. I fume that we are not in government and that the Tories are running the NHS.

Mornings are transformed now that I am no longer acting leader. I lie in bed listening to *Today* — hoping Labour's argument will triumph, but glad not to be the one to make it. Instead of sweating over preparation for Prime Minister's Questions, I tweet pictures of my kittens.



At the *Spectator* Parliamentarian of the Year Awards I find an unlikely kindred spirit. Having loathed the Tories in the Commons for decades — especially their economic policy — it's startling to find how much I have in common with former chancellor Nigel Lawson. No, it's not just that we both love Nigella nor, eerily, that both of us have the same hair colour we did in our forties. It is that I, too, am now a 'former'. I used to pity the political 'formers' hanging around the fringes of politics. But



I love being one. Nigel Lawson, who was one of many formers and soon-to-be-formers at the lunch, pointed out to me that, with the recent sad demise of two political giants, Geoffrey Howe and Dennis Healey, he is now the most senior former! I'm only a new former and I'll never make it to the dizzy heights of former chancellor.

On to the second meeting of our new Joint Committee on Human Rights — half peers and half MPs. Despite never having been on a select committee before, I'm the chair. Our first inquiry is into the government's new use of drone strikes. What exactly is the policy? Is there a 'kill list'? Who puts names on it? Are strikes fully legal and accountable? Note to self: 'Pay close attention to *Homeland*'.

The Sunday newspapers are full of the Tory plans to water down the Human Rights Act. It's not a good sign that they're now calling it 'Labour's Human Rights Act'. It's one ominous step from that to scrapping it altogether.

Off to the Southwark remembrance service in Borough High Street. Like most MPs I go to our local ceremony every year and value highly the moment of reflection and contemplation. But one particularly freezing November when we were standing there before the silence, with an icy wind whipping round, I moaned to Tessa Jowell, my fellow Southwark MP, that my feet and hands were numb with the cold. 'But think,' she said, 'how much colder it was for the soldiers in the trenches.' She left the Commons in May and this Sunday was the first time in over 20 years that we didn't stand next to each other during the silence. I really miss her. People still muddle us up, but I'm happy to have well-wishers come up and congratulate me on bringing the Olympics to London.

After the service, there is a meeting of Camberwell and Peckham Labour party women members. Nationally, there's a clean sweep of men in the top positions now: Labour leader, deputy leader, general secretary, NEC chair, London mayoral candidate... Once again, time to step up our efforts to insist women get an equal say.

# Donald Trump and the Republican cabaret show

*Washington DC*  
**A** friend of mine asked his father, aged 82: 'Dad, at this stage of life, what do you enjoy most?' Dad replied: 'Voting Republican and being left alone by your mother.' Surely an unimproveable definition of bliss.

My friend told me this in the 1980s, long before the Republican nomination contest turned into reality TV. Would his dad still enjoy voting Republican? Look what choices he'd have — from among nearly 20 candidates, a veritable embarrassment of riches. Or is it best that Dad has since gone to his eternal rest and has been spared seeing what has happened to his once-beloved GOP?

In Paris last week, chatting with a journalist friend esteemed for his deep knowledge of American politics, I asked a bit warily, 'Er, what are you all saying about M. Trump over here?' I braced for an elegant excoriation. But Philippe only shrugged, beautifully, as only the French can, and said mildly, 'Well, we think it's...' here he may have inserted a slight *puh*, '...a bit strange.'

*D'accord.* I told him that many of us, *aussi*, are finding it all a bit fruity, even as one must stipulate that it makes for good theatre. It wasn't so long ago that a rerun of the movie *Casablanca* would garner quadruple the ratings of a political debate. Now we can barely wait for the next one, to see if M. Trump will remark on the prodigious output of Senator Rubio's sweat glands; or the commentator's menstrual cycle; or Ms. Fiorina's putative facial resemblance to a horse.

Of course, it's possible that we're paying such close attention in order learn where the candidates stand on immigration, on China's new passion for creating islands out of reefs in the South China Sea, and on whether we should arm kindergarten teachers with AK-47s or Glock 9s. Well, only a year to go until the election. How quickly it's gone by! What have we learned on the Republican side?

Should we have been surprised that M. Trump would consume all the oxygen in every room? *Spy* magazine got it perfectly back in the 1980s when it dubbed him a 'short-fingered vulgarian.' What more need be said? But yes, it was bracing to hear him denigrate the war record of John McCain, America's pre-eminent war hero. And who'd have predicted he would declare that Megyn Kelly should have stayed in her red tent instead of moderating the first debate?

What was surprising was that he should

have attained frontrunner status. This development left the punditariat to huff that Trump's base consisted of — to put it as demographically as they could — 'non-college-educated white males', this being punditariat-speak for 'troglodyte' and 'prole'. And to shrug — if less elegantly than Philippe — on the Sunday-morning TV shows and tell everyone to relax; that Donald Trump would not be the nominee of the Republican Party. It would pass, like an outbreak of herpes.

And yet The Donald is very much with us. He has not passed. He is a very persistent case of herpes. The Sabbath gasbags can only offer another bit of cold comfort, that (finally!) the short-fingered vulgarian has been overtaken by... oh dear... Dr Carson, the

*The run-up to the primaries was supposed to be a calm and orderly rehearsal for the anointing of Jeb Bush*

somnolent but sweet-natured neurosurgeon who doesn't believe in evolution. Or abortion. Or gun control. Or... but look, everyone relax. Ben Carson is not going to be the nominee of the Republican party. OK?

Something seems to have gone rather wrong with the script. This is not where we were supposed to be at this point. The run-up to the primaries was supposed to be a calm and orderly rehearsal for the anointing of Jeb Bush. Who better to run against Bill Clinton's wife than George W. Bush's brother? Or, if you prefer, than George H.W. Bush's son?

A year ago, at a gathering of bigwigs in Washington, a speaker brought down the house by saying that Jeb Bush's candidacy shows the Bush family's commitment to No Child Left Behind. (NCLB was an education bill pushed through the Congress by George W., back in the days when presidents got stuff pushed through the Congress.)

Due to lacklustre debate performances,



*'The John Lewis advert seems to start earlier every year.'*

and unfortunate off-the-cuff remarks (of yet another gun slaughter at a school, Mr Bush shrugged, 'Stuff happens') his campaign is in what his father used to call 'deep doo-doo'. The headlines are asking Will He Drop Out? and Is It Over For Jeb Bush? To add oomph coming out of the starting gate, his campaign adopted as its trademark Jeb!, the exclamation mark becoming a part of his name. Alas for his admirers — to say nothing of the big donors — Jeb! has turned into Jeb? Oh dear.

The cliche in American politics is that one week is an eternity. So it is premature to pronounce the candidacy dead. His political action committee is sitting on \$100 million, ready to be converted into Hillary attack ads once the real show begins in February. That kind of dough could put the ! back in Jeb.

To add another layer of irony, Mr. Bush has now been eclipsed by his former protege, Senator Marco Rubio. As the current headline puts it: Is Rubio the Republican Obama? Which is to say: is our best shot in 2016 a version of the man who captured the country's imagination in 2004 — a charismatic person of colour with an exotic background and hardly any experience at governance?

Obama's resume consisted of 'community organiser' and two inconsequential years in the US Senate. Rubio's voting record is said to be the worst in the Senate. Bush got off the only *bon mot* of his campaign in the last debate when he taunted Rubio: 'Is it [the Senate] like a French work week?' Touché!

As to background, Obama's grandfather was a Kenyan goatherd. Even diversity-lusting Democrats were left momentarily speechless on learning *that* qualification. Mr Rubio's parents are Cuban-born and Castro-fleeing. His father was a bartender, his mother a hotel maid. He married a former cheerleader of the Miami Dolphins football team. His children are picture-perfect. A campaign manager would give his eye-teeth for a client like that.

But there is untidiness: his French work ethic in the Senate, questions about finances. Oh, and a close friend of Mr Rubio's — unidentified, and small wonder — was quoted on the subject of his true feelings about his senatorial job: 'He hates it.' Thanks, amigo.

These flaws don't feel fatal, especially in the context of the current baying for 'authenticity' in our candidates. What's more 'authentic' than a worm in a delicious apple? Though as we prepare to bite, we should remember that the only thing worse than finding a worm in an apple is finding half a worm.

# THE SPECTATOR'S NOTES

Charles Moore

The other day, a friend told me, he had been chatting to an old friend of his who has spent his life in diplomacy and international relations. The man, who will quite soon retire, has had a successful career, but he was full of gloom. Essentially, he said, the entire system of international relations has now been working very badly for 20 years, having worked much better in the previous 50 or so. No one — particularly no one in the West — can see a way through this, but the chancelleries and ministers are reluctant to confront this sad truth, and so a pointless merry-go-round of international conferences, bodies and negotiations consumes the energies of those foolish enough to stay in the game. My friend's friend now longs to do something which actually helps actual people. I suspect that this disillusionment is not unusual, nor unjustified. No one knows how to concert the affairs of the world today. I am just old enough to remember a similar feeling in the 1970s, but at that time the remedy — a remoralisation of the West — was possible and, indeed, was administered. Is there a remedy now? I don't know, but one would not advise an able young person to join the Foreign Office, the European Commission or the United Nations.

Why are international sports bodies inveterately corrupt? Could part of the answer be that they have very few women on them? I am not saying that women are intrinsically better people than men, but they are less likely to be members of the mental club which instinctively lets your mates do whatever they want.

Faithful readers of this column will know that I do not have a television licence for my flat in London, because I do not have a television. As a result, I receive a couple of letters a month demanding that I prove my innocence, which I never answer because I do not see why I should. Indeed, they normally remain unopened. This week, however, I received one in a window envelope. Through the window, I could see the calendar for November and the 24th of



the month circled in red. 'We're giving you ten days to get correctly licensed', it said, and implied that if I did not do so it would send an 'Enforcement Officer' after me to start a 'full investigation'. Such messages are wrong, and may be well be illegal. TV Licensing is not a public authority, and therefore has no power of enforcement, so Steve Latham, the enforcement manager, who sent the letter, is falsely titled. It also libels all bona fide non-television owners to whom it sends this message because it implies we are cheats. I think I shall invent an authority called something like 'Keeping Kids Safe', and write to Mr Latham saying that he has ten days to prove he is not a paedophile. If we do not hear from him, we shall send Tom Watson MP to break his door down.

Kingsley Amis used to say that one of the two worst phrases in the English language was 'Shall we go straight in?' (The other was 'Red or white?') Increasingly, I find myself feeling it is one of the best. Why is it considered a good thing to sit, or — much worse — stand, for a long time drinking when there is food to be had? I yearn to eat as soon as a meal is in the offing, and when I say 'eat', I do not mean peanuts and canapés, but actual, plentiful food, sitting down with a knife and fork at a table. Until this happens, I cannot sustain a conversation for long and will either drink too much while waiting or, attempting self-discipline, stick to water and stare austerely at my merry companions. Even the leisurely study of menus in restaurants which some people go in for is painful: I find myself calculating the number of minutes they will take to decide, add to it the number of minutes taken to prepare and deliver the food, and then realise that nothing might

pass my lips for the next 40 minutes. I believe that, in Victorian society, the gong went, everyone assembled in the drawing-room for five minutes, without a drink, and went in to dine. Was it the invention of cocktails which made it all go wrong?

At my dear uncle Norman Moore's funeral in Dorset last week, my sister read out a poem by John Clare called 'Emmonsails Heath in Winter'. Clare describes how 'coy bumblebees, twenty in a drove, / Flit down the hedgerows in the frozen plain/ And hang on little twigs and start again.' Bumblebees are long-tailed tits. How, as children, we would have giggled at the word; but of course the word 'tit' also made us gasp with delight at hearing grown-ups say something which, in other contexts, was impermissibly 'rude'. *The Observer's Book of Birds*, presumably worried by this, was always careful to refer to a tit as a 'titmouse', which I believe is correct, but never used in real life. In those more prudish days, huge tension entered public occasions if any naughty innuendo could be picked up from a word, as it does nowadays over anything that might be considered racist. At Norman's funeral we sang 'In the bleak midwinter', including the verse with the phrase 'a breastful of milk'. When I was a child, this was usually omitted as being risqué. I remember that once, in our village carol service, it was included: the congregation was too embarrassed to sing it and muttered and mumbled instead. *Autres temps, autres moeurs*.

On Monday night, I arrived in Bath to make a speech. It was raining and I didn't know where I was going. A man who had also got off the train saw my perplexity and kindly walked with me the quarter of an hour to my destination, even though it was out of his way. As we chatted, I discovered he was the chief executive of the Nationwide, the only large building society which never demutualised. Maybe I am being unfair, but I suspect the chief executives of our big banks would not have gone to the same trouble.

# The wrong cuts

Jeremy Hunt is right to fight for NHS reform. But he's going after the wrong people, on the wrong issue

MAX PEMBERTON



**I**t has long been rumoured that when Jeremy Hunt took over as Health Secretary, Cameron told him to do one thing with the NHS: keep it out of the headlines. Given that the NHS is an enormous institution, the public take an avid interest in it and it is frequently rocked by scandals and financial difficulties, this was no easy task. Until a few weeks ago, Hunt had managed it with aplomb. And then the junior doctor fiasco happened. It has been cataclysmic, one of the worst public relations disasters to rock a government department for years, and it shows no signs of abating. In fact, it's likely that things will escalate even further when the results of the BMA ballot on industrial action is announced next week — junior doctors seem certain to vote to strike.

This would be an incredibly high-risk strategy for the medical profession and has the potential to be hugely self-sabotaging. At the moment, junior doctors have tremendous public support. But it could take only one needless, tragic death while they were on strike for the support they currently enjoy to crumble. Given the nature of the work doctors do, this is a very plausible outcome. No matter that a skeleton service would continue, with cover by consultants; the sheer number of junior doctors and their vital role in keeping the NHS afloat would inevitably mean that patients will suffer.

There is not a single junior doctor who wants to strike if there is another way out of this mess, and certainly none of them want to cause any harm to their patients. But they feel desperate. They are having ludicrous terms enforced that no worker would tolerate. Hunt's much-publicised offer of a 'pay rise' of 11 per cent was in fact a masterclass in political spin and manipulation. People in the public sector — except, of course, MPs — don't usually get increases of that sort.

It sounded too good to be true and it was. The offer was entirely disingenuous. It was pure genius because it subtly made it appear that the current row with junior doctors is about a pay rise, which it is not, and also that he had made a generous offer, which he has not. Even the way it was announced — through the press rather than official channels — meant that he got all the headlines while the BMA were frantically on the

phone the next morning asking the Department of Health for details.

In truth, the dispute with the junior doctors was never about them asking for more money — it was started when Hunt tried to introduce contracts that would mean pay cuts. All the 11 per cent offer actually does is increase basic pay — when in reality most doctors' salaries are substantially reliant on additional money from out-of-hours work, which will be cut. In real terms, this means a reduction in their income — a reduction which some estimate at about 26 per cent.

It's not just about the money. Medics have raised significant concerns about the

*By picking on junior doctors, Hunt has taken on one of the parts of the NHS that works quite well*

safety of the new contract, arguing that it would remove the financial penalties that stop hospitals from making doctors work excessive hours, and would reduce training opportunities.

Why on earth is Hunt doing all this? Some doctors have tried to paint him as a pantomime villain causing mayhem for the fun of it, but he is actually quite a decent man. While I might not always agree with him from the ideological perspective of how best to help the NHS, it's hard to disagree with many of the things he says about it, and he seems to really care.

He is, though, a Gove-worshipper who wants to be blooded. He wants to do with health what Michael Gove did with schools.

He wants to be seen as a strong statesman who has taken on something few would attempt and succeeded. Emboldened by the Tories' new majority, he thinks now is the perfect time for that fight.

He may well have noble sentiments, but he has not thought this through and he has picked entirely the wrong battle. By tackling junior doctors, he has taken on one of the parts of the NHS that works quite well and which delivers amazing value for money. From the point of view of the clinicians, the fact that the Health Secretary fails to appreciate this is emblematic of how out of touch politicians are when it comes to the NHS. And what's more, the goal he's fighting for is misconceived.

The origins of the current problems over junior doctors' contracts can be traced back to the government's election pledge of introducing a seven-day-a-week NHS. When they first announced this proposal, many questioned where the money to do it would come from, and the government was unable to provide any answers. It seemed particularly strange given that not only was there no extra money in the NHS pot, but we have been constantly told that the NHS needs to make savings — to the tune of £30 billion over the next five years. It just didn't make sense.

The answer they have stumbled on is to change the contract for junior doctors so that there is less distinction between weekdays and weekends, and to widen the definition of 'normal' hours so that doctors can work later without them having to be paid higher rates. Doctors could thus be expected to work Saturdays and late nights for no extra money.

In effect, the plan was to use the same number of doctors and just spread them more thinly over seven days. Unfortunately the proposed changes meant that the vast number of junior doctors who already work weekends or evenings would be significantly out of pocket.

The entire thing is completely avoidable because it's based on a fundamental misunderstanding of what sort of NHS we really need. The government has been obsessed with a seven-day NHS, but this is a ludicrous pipe dream which they should give up

on. They made the same promise five years ago and it failed to materialise, so they are clearly determined that the same won't happen again. But given the shortage of money, and indeed of doctors, we need to be pragmatic.

The study showing increased weekend hospital mortality that caused so much panic has since been found to be flawed. Even so, of course we must ensure we provide the best care available to those who need it at weekends and out of hours. There is no doubt that consultant-led service improves the quality of patient care. A 2012 report by the Academy of Medical Royal Colleges cited dozens of figures which point to this.

But the government seems to have come up with a wish list of luxuries we simply can't afford — hence the current fracas with the junior doctors. We need to make the distinction between hospitals opening for safety and opening for convenience.

It would seem far more sensible to look at areas of critical care — A&E, cardiac and stroke wards, maternity services, intensive care; the kinds of places where people are acutely unwell and need regular senior input — and focus our attention there. You'll find that many of these areas already operate a seven-day NHS as far as the doctors are concerned. Paediatrics, for example, has long ago accepted the need for seven-day-a-week consultant input and have structured services accordingly, without recruiting more consultants.

We also need to accept that some specialities — such as dermatology or rheumatology — do not need to provide seven-day cover. While it might be nice, people simply do not need to have a dermatology outpatient appointment on a Sunday afternoon. Rather than promising the same service every day, we should be prioritising the areas where people are sickest and therefore in most need.

This leads on to the next issue — doctors are not actually the problem with delivering this anyway. Doctors do not operate on their own. In a hospital, they are part of a much bigger system and reliant on many other professionals and services to do their job. It's no use having a team of doctors seeing patients if there aren't the services in place that they need in order to do their jobs. You can't safely discharge older patients unless they've been assessed by an occupational therapist, for example.

To run a truly seven-day NHS you'd also need to ensure that there were radiology services, so that people could have scans. You'd need a fully staffed endoscopy suite. You'd need to have fully staffed physiotherapy, speech and language therapy and psychology departments. You'd need full-capacity admin teams to book in appointments, and porters to collect and transfer patients. When you see it like this, the doctors are just

# A trust betrayed

KATIA FLORMAN

Like many of my fellow junior doctors, I trusted a Conservative government with the NHS. If it's to stay strong and up to date, a health service cannot remain static. It needs not just money but carefully thought-out reform — as well as a strong economy to support it.

Just after the general election, David Cameron laid out the problem as he saw it: a 'weekend effect' where a patient admitted to hospital on a Sunday is 16 per cent more likely to die than one admitted on a Wednesday. 'So seven-day care isn't just about a better service — it's about saving lives,' he said. This is a classic example of a little knowledge being a dangerous thing.

When I work weekend shifts, I do notice that services could be improved — not everyone in a hospital works seven days. But if Jeremy Hunt wants to remedy this, he should incentivise more doctors to work out of hours. Instead, he plans to penalise those of us who already do. Yes, pay for normal hours will rise by 11 per cent — but 'normal hours' will be defined as lasting until 10 p.m., Monday to Saturday. This will, of course, mean less money for doctors who work late into

evenings. But even more importantly, it will deter junior doctors from pursuing specialisms with more out-of-hours work — such as accident and emergency, paediatrics, and acute medicine.

Junior doctors training in A&E already work the most evenings, nights and weekends. Currently they are rewarded financially for this,

## Half of casualty doctors quit after four years

in the same way that most workers — from cleaners to policemen — are. But without the out-of-hours premium, a career in A&E becomes even less appealing. The NHS is already facing a recruitment and retention crisis. Dr Cliff Mann, Britain's most senior casualty medic, recently explained that half of all our trainee A&E doctors abandon the profession after four years. It's tough, harrowing work — and making it pay less will not address the recruitment crisis. He calculates that some 600 consultants and trainee A&E doctors have emigrated in five years.

Fewer trainees in A&E means more gaps in the staff rota, which will have to

filled with expensive locum doctors — resulting in a higher cost to the taxpayer. A cap on locum rates (something Jeremy Hunt has introduced from next April) will just make these gaps harder to fill. Market forces govern locum rates. It seems strange that the Tories would try to cap prices when they can usually grasp free-market economics: price-fixing leads to shortages.

It costs about £230,000 to train a doctor — and that investment will be lost if British doctors keep fleeing abroad. At the last count, almost a quarter of specialist doctors in Australia came from the UK. If things go on like this, the budget for training doctors might be recategorised as overseas aid.

As I quickly found out, being a junior doctor often means working long past your allotted hours. You stay until the job is done, whether or not you're paid for the overtime. We stay because we care. If we strike, then, as we may well do, it won't be because we're greedy but because we can't bear to see the service we love damaged so badly.

*Katia Florman is a junior doctor at a London teaching hospital.*

a tiny cog in a very large machine.

The government have made a mistake. They did it with the best intentions — they wanted to improve the NHS and improve patient safety. They latched on to the idea of a seven-day NHS without really thinking it through or understanding the issues. They should focus all their attention on ensuring

that the critical care aspects of what hospitals do — which is where the sickest patients are — are fully staffed and operating at maximum efficiency. Junior doctors are already working flat out in these areas.

Jeremy Hunt needs to accept that he has made a mistake by pushing a blanket seven-day-a-week NHS agenda, and get back to negotiating a reasonable new contract with the junior doctors that doesn't mean they will be taking a pay cut.

And the BMA need to be gracious in this, accept his climbdown and reopen the negotiations to ensure that junior doctors get a decent deal and, most importantly, that patients are kept safe.



'There's a rumour going round it was murder.'

# And still they come

How tiny Lebanon copes with an unstoppable flow of Syrian refugees

MICHAEL KARAM

*Beirut*  
If any of the Syrian refugees who have made it to the relative safety of Europe have been watching the smash-hit TV show *Homeland* (season five), they would be baffled by its warped depiction of their compatriots' plight in Lebanon.

Unlike the vast majority of *Homeland*'s viewers, they would know there are no government-sanctioned camps guarded by nervy UN soldiers and run from the inside by menacing Hezbollah operatives. This is out-and-out nonsense and insulting to the Lebanese, who have arguably done more than any country to absorb this unfolding human tragedy.

For the record, Lebanon, a country a tad bigger than Wales, plays host to around 1.5 million Syrians, a number equivalent to a third of its population. Think of it this way: it's the same as 21 million Europeans moving quite suddenly to the UK. Imagine what you'd make of that.

The Lebanese can be proud of doing their bit but, truth be told, they didn't really have much say in the matter. The Syrians just came. And the concern today is not just the shock of so many more people, it's that their long-term presence may push the country into yet another existential crisis.

The majority of refugees started arriving in 2011 with only what they could carry, trekking over the historically porous border into the North, or across the vast and often lawless Bekaa Valley. Many thousands stopped in the valley and live there still in pitiful makeshift tent communities. They'll freeze in the harsh winter months.

Other refugees made it further, to our cities, to the capital Beirut as well as Sidon and Tripoli. They are everywhere: begging at traffic lights, walking precariously on the hard shoulder of highways, trudging along country roads or sleeping, whole families huddled together on filthy cardboard sheets, under bridges and flyovers.

Many are exploited by unscrupulous landlords and rely on modest cash handouts from the UN Refugee Agency. But they are undermined by the unstoppable flow of their own countrymen. The more Syrians arrive, the more the NGOs have to

discriminate in favour of those most in need of financial aid: the elderly, the pregnant or those with small children. Men of working age must fend for themselves.

Think how agitated the British become about the thought of a few thousand refugees. Now try to imagine how the indigenous Lebanese feel. The country's notoriously creaky infrastructure, its electricity and water, roads, bandwidth and mobile phone

*Think of it this way: it's the same as 21 million Europeans moving quite suddenly to the UK*

connectivity, could hardly support its own population, let alone the newcomers. Yet somehow it manages, which might give the British some pause for thought. Lebanon manages because after years of war and a peace, its people are masters of crisis management. The Syrians are also fellow Arabs. We could hardly turn them away.

With hindsight, a mere £20 million could

## FROM THE ARCHIVE

### The liberty of the battlefield

*From 'Soldiers for the land',  
The Spectator, 13 November 1915:*

It is certain that, when the war is over, tens of thousands of soldiers will not want to return to their former urban occupations. No man who has enjoyed the liberty of a greater world and a freer life will be reconciled easily to resuming his job of, say, working a lift, or enduring stuffy hours in a shop, or addressing envelopes in an office. The nearest reproduction of the campaigner's life which will be normally possible for him will be settlement on the land. There he will campaign, against all the pests which try to cheat the farmer of his living, but in all his strategy and tactics he will have the sovereign satisfaction of feeling that he is living at fine and spacious life in which the results correspond to his own energy and judgment.

have bought every Syrian family a cosy bespoke tent with five-year lifespan made at Ikea's Corporate Social Responsibility arm, which would be infinitely preferable to a makeshift shelter or a cardboard box. But (and this is where *Homeland* really slips up) the Lebanese government equates tents and camps with permanence and with the enduring legacy of 500,000 Palestinians who are either still waiting to go back to a country they lost in 1948, or who are too young to know what that country means.

Letting so very many Syrians seep into normal Lebanese society has had a rocky effect on our economy. According to a World Bank report on the effects of the Syrian civil war: 'Even without the Syrian refugees, the Lebanese economy needed to create six times the amount of jobs it previously did to absorb new entrants to the labour market.' As it is, the migrants are ruthlessly undercutting their hosts. Lebanese builders, joiners, plasterers, painters and the like have been priced out of the market by desperate Syrian labour.

Not all Syrians are slumming it. For the more wealthy, especially the merchant class with influential friends, the transition was smoother. Apartments were rented in Beirut and in the cooler, hilly suburbs, while their children were miraculously accepted into the top schools. These well-to-do escapees eat out and shop with the rest of the Lebanese bourgeoisie. They look like them and dress like them. Only the number plates and the slight accent set them apart. And yes, they will admit that Assad has been cruel, but they will also argue that he is the only man who can stop the thundering tide of Sunni fundamentalism sweeping across the region.

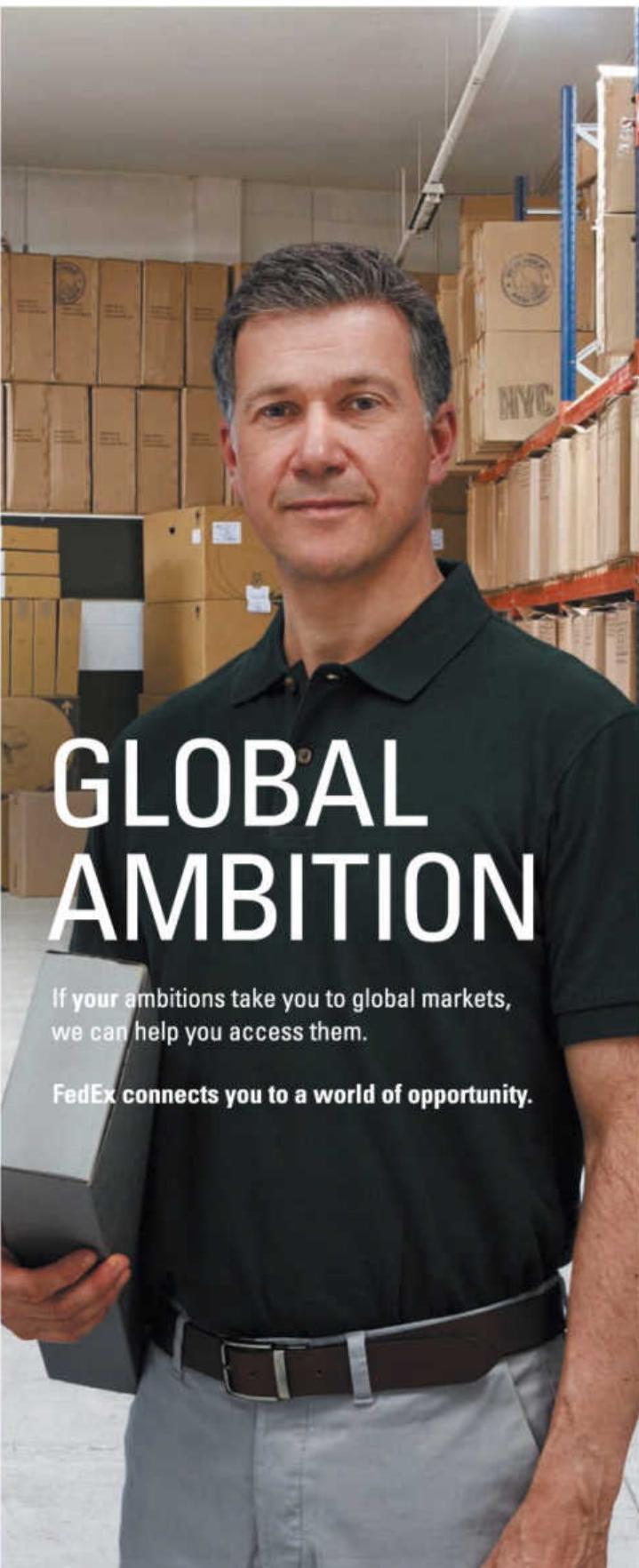
It's the poorer Syrian refugees who present a greater existential problem for Lebanon. Under Ottoman rule, which did not end until 1917, Lebanon was part of Greater Syria. Tribal ties in parts of the country often matter more than international borders and there is every reason to assume that many of the refugees will never return to Syria.

This would not only change the face of Lebanon but also its soul. These are not just 1.5 million Syrians; they are 1.5 million Sunnis. Even if only half of them stay, their presence will upset our delicate sectarian balance of Shia, Sunni and Christian. And there isn't a cat in hell's chance of Hezbollah, the biggest Shia party, caring for these poor Sunnis. New and cataclysmic sectarian rifts will open up in a country that sits right on top of the Middle East's fault lines.

What Lebanon really needs is for everyone else to do their bit; for Europe to do its bit. The British are in a panic about importing so-called jihadis, but a reputation for hard work and family values has defined the people of the Levant for centuries. We've taken 1.5 million and we survive — just. Take 20,000. Trust me. You won't even notice them.



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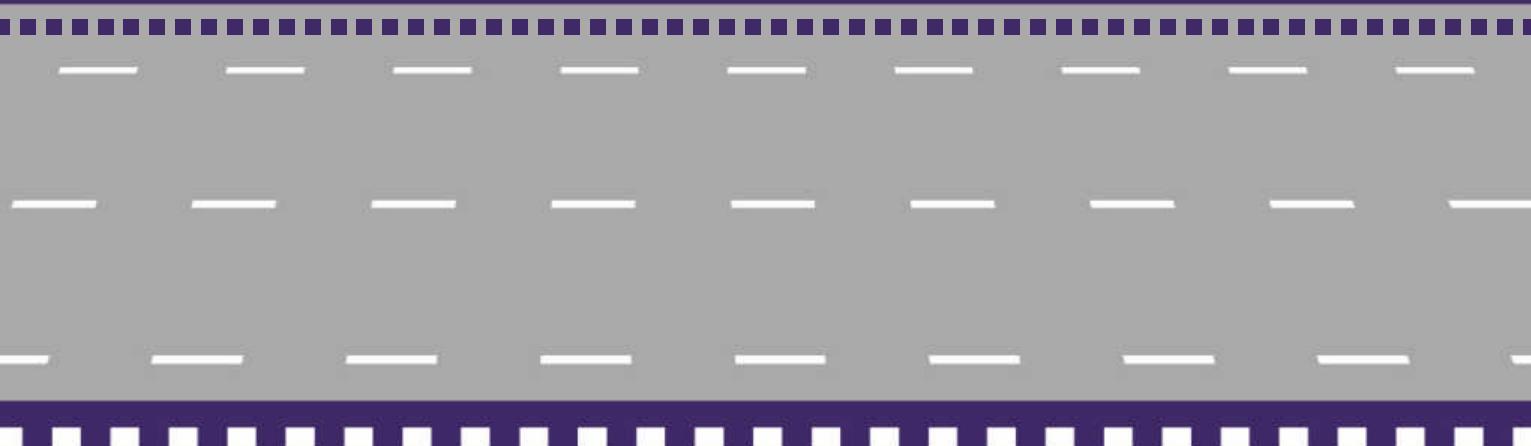
**"HEATHROW HAS TODAY RELEASED A NEW VIDEO SHOWING HOW AN IMPROVED, 14 LANE, M25 COULD LOOK WITH HEATHROW EXPANSION."**

HEATHROW, 19 AUGUST 2015



**"WE'LL HAVE NO MORE CARS ON THE ROAD AS A RESULT OF HEATHROW EXPANSION."**

JOHN HOLLAND KAYE, HEATHROW CEO, 4 NOVEMBER 2015



Last week Heathrow set out its plan for tackling illegal air quality for its proposed third runway - no more cars. Evidently the highly publicised 14 lane M25 expansion will all be for nothing. Convinced?

Something doesn't add up.

Get the facts about the runway debate at [gatwickobviously.com](http://gatwickobviously.com) and @LGWobviously

LONDON *Gatwick*  
OBVIOUSLY.

# Of course there's no morality in top-level sport



Why do transgendered people need separate toilets? I thought, according to the prevalent orthodoxy, that the new gender they had acquired was every bit as authentic as the one they had jubilantly renounced. So a separate toilet is surely otiose. And not just that, but the suggestion that they might need a separate toilet for micturition through their surgically emended private parts is surely offensive. The Speaker of the House of Commons, John Bercow, may be in trouble, then, for announcing his intention to install these mysterious receptacles throughout the Palace of Westminster to service the hordes of transgendered workers wandering around with extravagant beehive hairdos and outsize stiletto heels. In trying to be more-PC-than-thou, he may in fact be committing the crime of cissexism, which is a very grave crime indeed.

Incidentally, if I am wrong, and transgendered folk really do require separate toilets, then won't at least two be needed in each site, one for her/him and one for him/her? That is the problem; the world has become terribly confusing, but I suppose this shouldn't persuade us that things were better in the past — which was nonetheless a more comforting place. Back then, men were men and women were women — apart from drag queens, who we all loved, and field-event competitors from the Soviet bloc. Gargantuan, grunting Bulgarian ladies heaving the discus 200 yards, Natasha from Petropavlovsk with her stubble and her steroids putting the shot and leaving our more fragrant babes in the shade. The commies always cheated in the Olympics — that was a given. And, furthermore, all foreigner competitors were on drugs. How the world has changed.

Today we are expected to affect surprise and outrage that the Russian government is involved in a gigantic subterfuge to ensure that its Olympic competitors in 2012 avoided being nobbled in drug tests. This had been the conclusion of a report by the World Anti-Doping Agency (Wada), which observed that there was a 'deeply rooted culture of cheating at all levels' in Russian athletics, and there were calls for the Russkies to be barred from taking part in the 2016 games in Rio de Janeiro. However, the times having changed,

our own pristine Sebastian Coe came in for stinging criticism too, in his role as President of the International Association of Athletics Federations. The IAAF had been utterly useless in rooting out the miscreants, 'inexplicably lax' and about as much use to the world as a transgendered bidet. (They didn't actually say the last bit, I was sort of paraphrasing.)

Coe had previously described allegations of mass doping and cover-ups as being 'a declaration of war' against his organisation, and he did nothing about it. His 'spiritual president', as Seb referred to a ghastly Senegalese chap called Lamine Diack, the previous boss of the IAAF, was meanwhile arrested on charges of money-laundering. Not a good week for Seb, then.

*When trying to win those World Cup bids, we did our own little bit of bribery too*

And you are kidding yourself if you think it's just the Russkies filling their athletes full of weird chemicals. Everyone seems to be up to it — yes, even us. Dozens of British sports stars have been censured for taking illegal substances.

Anyway, this Wada report was described as 'sport's darkest day' by one of our daily newspapers and the story led all of the news bulletins, with exclamations of shock and outrage expressed by politicians, sports officials, people who run very fast etc. The darkest day? Maybe the darkest day for a month or so, since the 'revelations' that world foot-

ball's governing body was corrupt and rotten from top to bottom. Little more than a network of greedy and thick third-worlders pocketing bungs from the immoral, autocratic and arrogant delegates of the more affluent countries. All that televised voting business for the rights to stage the World Cup — a fix. Jeepers, who'da thunk it, etc. The magnificently repulsive boss of Fifa, Sepp Blatter, revealed that England's bid for the 2018 World Cup, on which we spent £20 million, was a complete waste of time and dosh because a deal had already been done to give it to Russia.

But our protests (and the demand for the return of our money) sounded hollow. We have all known, for at least 15 years, that Fifa was a thoroughly corrupt organisation. We have known it absolutely unequivocally since Fifa awarded the 2022 World Cup to Qatar: a slave state where it is impossible to play football in the summer months, when the World Cup is traditionally held. But at every juncture our own footballing authorities continued to connive with Fifa, most recently throwing their support behind Blatter's ally and henchman, Michel Platini, in his bid to become the next Fifa president. Even a subsequent inquiry into Platini — he took a 'payment' of more than a million quid from Blatter, as part of a 'gentleman's agreement', whatever that's supposed to mean — has yet to fully convince the FA and other domestic authorities that old Michel may not be the best bet to clean out the Augean stables of football's governing body.

And of course, when trying to win those World Cup bids, we did our little bit of bribery too. We bought the wives of the delegates Mulberry handbags worth £230 each during that pointless bid for the 2018 World Cup. So we bribe, sure enough — we just don't bribe enough. We should have withdrawn from Fifa a long time ago and maybe persuaded one or two like-minded countries to follow suit.

But there is no morality in sport at the highest level; certainly not from the administrators and not from a good many of the competitors, either. This has been the year that top sport was revealed as a corrupt racket. Now tell me something I didn't know.



*'I'm into wearable tech.'*

*Roger Alton on Lord Coe, p. 85.*

# The caliphate strikes back

Isis could be on the brink of creating a terrifying new world order

JOHN R. BRADLEY

When the creation of a new caliphate was announced last year, who but the small band of his followers took seriously its leader's prediction of imminent regional and eventual global dominance? It straddled the northern parts of Syria and Iraq, two countries already torn apart by civil war and sectarian hatreds. So the self-declared caliph, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, appeared to be just another thug and opportunist ruling over a blighted no-man's land, little known and still less revered in the wider Islamic world. He was surrounded by a rag-tag army of jihadis, whose imperial hubris seemed to reflect only a warped genocidal fanaticism. Surely they were far too otherworldly, with their obsession over the life lived by their prophet and his companions more than 1,400 years ago, to have much of an impact on the world in which we scuttle off to work each morning?

Two years on, even the most hardened sceptic is having second thoughts. The apparent bombing of a Russian airliner last week, minutes after taking off from the Egyptian resort of Sharm el-Sheikh, was proof of the caliphate's potential to wreak havoc on a global scale. It left hundreds of thousands of Britons, Russians and others stranded and distraught, or hastily cancelling their holidays. Here was more evidence, too, that Islamic State's strategy of recruiting the Muslim masses by impoverishing them, while damning all among them who do not shun or kill infidels, is likely to be far more consequential than al-Qaeda's spectacular attacks against prominent western targets. Egypt, after all, had been the only Arab country (apart from Iran-controlled Iraq) to openly support Russian airstrikes in Syria, and just a few weeks after making that fateful decision its most important resort is deserted. Others, such as Luxor and Aswan on the Nile, have been ghost towns since the 2011 uprising that toppled Hosni Mubarak.

Egypt was, in other words, just as much a target as Russia. The country's tourism-dependent economy has been decimated, as has Tunisia's following the slaughter of mostly British tourists there in June by another Isis-inspired terrorist. Both may take years to recover, and the fallout in the meantime will be a great boon for jihadist recruiters. This is part and parcel of the caliph's strat-



egy of bringing order out of chaos. For with such an overwhelming sense of hopelessness and helplessness, even cripplingly rigid tyranny starts looking like a preferable alternative. We have seen this play out repeatedly throughout the Sunni-majority areas of Iraq and Syria under the caliphate's control, and in Taliban-dominated parts of Afghanistan.

The caliph must be rubbing his hands in glee. For the first time in modern history, large parts of the Arab world are now effectively off limits to Westerners — even if Isis was just jumping on the bandwagon of an acci-

*Even Cairo's airport is in such a mess that staff once left a donkey to wander around inside it for days*

dent. Meanwhile, millions of refugees and economic migrants, most of them Arab Muslims, continue to flood into Europe. Among them, if the caliphate's propaganda is to be believed (and there is no reason to doubt it), are many who are determined to repay the kindness of strangers by blowing themselves and innocents to smithereens in the name of their beloved leader. This horrid little fascist, unrecognised as an authority on anything by anyone but himself until a few months ago, is turning the world on its head.

Taking stock of a new reality is what Vladimir Putin, the caliph's main adversary, is also busy doing. Bedevilled by a growing jihadist threat at home and with the grim knowledge that some 8,000 Russian jihadis

are believed to be fighting for the caliph with the dream of one day taking their fight to the homeland, Putin had sold the war in Syria as a way of making ordinary Russians safer. His popularity soared; but now a plane load of Russian holidaymakers are dead. More than a month into an aerial campaign officially slated to last just three or four, the Syrian army has managed to recapture only a few villages. And Isis fighters, according to some estimates numbering in the hundreds of thousands, are still emerging from fortified bunkers to carry out counterattacks in the most strategically crucial part of Syria. Russia can fire all the cruise missiles it likes, but without greater international co-ordination the caliphate clearly is not going anywhere soon.

However, with appalling cynicism Washington is happy, for the time being, to watch Putin sink deeper into the Syrian quagmire, flirting with the idea of a peace deal between the warring factions while its ally Saudi Arabia ratchets up arms supplies to those who are preposterously called 'moderate' rebels. Many critics of the West's role in Syria point to Libya as an example of the potential perils of such forced and ill-thought-out regime change. To be sure, that is a relevant point; but a more accurate analogy can be drawn with Afghanistan. There, too, Washington and its Saudi ally, via Pakistan, armed and funded the mujahideen to fight the Russians, who withdrew from that cursed country in humiliating defeat. Those jihadis also told their paymasters everything they wanted to hear about being freedom fighters and pro-western, then morphed into the Taliban.

Putin is not a leader to show weakness under pressure, and Russia is not the Soviet Union. His initial response to the terror attack will be to increase airstrikes, while using the state-controlled media to drum up yet more mindless patriot fervour among the masses. But with consistently low oil prices, Russia's economy is rapidly hurtling towards insolvency; and the longer the war drags on the more likely the prospect that terror attacks at home, in addition to inevitable civilian casualties in Syria, will undermine support for his self-declared crusade. This, sadly, is what Washington is hoping for, and its own endgame is much easier to discern: to get Putin to ditch President Bashar al-Assad so that everyone can save face in a war that has reached stalemate. Putin may be ruthlessly authoritarian, but he is also a master political pragmatist, and within hours of the terror attack he let a Kremlin minion state publicly, for the first time, that Russia did not consider Assad to be unexpendable.

But how can we have faith in our political leaders to deal intelligently and rationally with the threat posed by the caliphate, even after a political deal is reached in a post-Assad Syria, if they cannot even bumble through a stage-managed press conference without making fools of themselves? The

Sharm attack came just hours before Egyptian President Abdul Fattah el-Sisi, scourge of the Islamists, came to the UK for a private meeting with David Cameron. They were to discuss, of all subjects, the fight against terrorism. Britain is Egypt's biggest foreign investor, and Egypt (almost needless to say) is a massive purchaser of British arms; the red-carpet welcome was actually in no small part to thank Sisi for a £8 billion gas deal granted earlier this year to BP.

Considered remarkably generous in BP's favour by energy experts, the deal was brokered, it is widely suspected, as part of a lobbying effort by Egypt (in conjunction with the UAE) to get the Muslim Brotherhood outlawed in Britain. But the facade of a war-on-terror alliance quickly came tumbling down — another feather in the caliph's turban — when it emerged that this tinpot dictator was, in reality, considered to be so lacking in integrity by the British government that it refused to share intelligence gathered on the possible cause of the Russian plane crash with him, despite the fact that he was sitting in Downing Street and the aircraft had fallen out of the sky in Egyptian airspace.

Thus Sisi's bid to be taken seriously on the world stage in the end only left him looking like the buffoon he is. Unbridled corruption, nepotism and cronyism were so rampant in his country, it turned out, that security at



*'If I'm on holiday, you'll have to get a locum to strike for me.'*

Sharm's airport was practically nonexistent. A former Egyptian head of the country's airport security summed up the absurdity when he revealed that even at Cairo's things are such a monumental mess that staff once left a donkey to wander around inside it for days.

In this way, just months after it was leaked that Britain had helped Saudi Arabia secure a seat on an important UN human rights panel, Britain's backdoor wheeling, dealing and horse-trading with yet another unsavoury Arab dictator was exposed. Under the guise of presenting Sisi as a steadfast supporter of the fight against radical Islam, Britain conveniently overlooked the fact that the Egyptian leader came to power by massacring more than a thousand peaceful demonstrators, and

that he presides over a country so hopelessly mired in corruption that a security guard at an Egyptian airport may even have let a terrorist pass through unchecked because, like our government, he was slipped a few quid.

The caliphate hopes the Cold War mentality in Washington and the insatiable desire to feed at the trough of Arab despots there and everywhere else will undermine any effort to destroy it, even if a new international coalition of the willing is eventually created. The caliph and his successors are in this for the long haul, and a close reading of their propaganda reveals a truly apocalyptic scenario. Their strategy depends principally on an uprising in Saudi Arabia, which would plunge the global economy into a catastrophic depression. Jordan, a Saudi client state where Islamists are the only serious opposition and where the King is considered a laughing stock, would immediately fall, leaving the soldiers of the caliph free to focus on their most anticipated battle for the 'liberation' of Jerusalem. It sounds fanciful and far-fetched, to the point of being ridiculous. But so did everything the caliph was saying two years ago about what we are quickly resigning ourselves to calling a terrifying new world order.

*John R. Bradley's latest book is After the Arab Spring: How Islamists Hijacked the Middle East Revolts.*

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Chief of the

Defence Staff Sir Nicholas Houghton is worried that Labour leader Jeremy Corbyn will never use the existing means of defence — Trident — to defend the country. Mr Corbyn is incandescent that a mere Chief of Defence Staff has the sheer effrontery to express a view on a matter that is (apparently) irrelevant to the defence of country but is purely political. One is reminded of the accession of Nero to Rome's imperial throne in AD 54.

According to the Roman historian Tacitus, it was dirty work by the controlling empress Agrippina that did for her husband Claudius, with the result that Nero, her son from an earlier marriage, was installed as emperor, aged 17. At that time there was trouble on Rome's eastern frontier. The Parthians (roughly modern Iran) had expelled Radamistus, Rome's nominee to the throne of Armenia, and were busy plundering the country. This was a clear threat to Rome's eastern provinces, and (said Tacitus) the Roman people, 'always eager for topics of conversation', were deeply concerned: how on earth could a mere 17-year-old deal with the threat? A youth under feminine control was hardly reassuring; and he was still being educated. Private tutors would have little to contribute to battles and sieges and all the other problems of war.

There was, however, another view. Nero could not be worse than Claudius; his tutors were highly experienced men; and Pompey and Augustus had both won battles in their teens. Surely it was command and planning that counted, and that depended on Nero's advisers; if they were up to scratch, Nero would then appoint the very best man for the job. In the event, the advice was good, and Nero did as he was told: top men took charge, and the Roman show of military might persuaded the Parthians to reach a settlement.

At least the 17-year-old Nero had an advisory council thrust upon him. There would simply be no point in Corbyn having one: it might contain soldiers. *Bis peccare in bello non licet*, it is said: you can't make more than one mistake in war. The Labour party has already made it.

— Peter Jones

# Lessons in jargon

Schools are becoming addicted to acronyms.  
It's not just silly, it's dangerous

JOE BARON

**E**xcuse me, sir. Seeing as how the VP is such a VIP, shouldn't we keep the PC on the QT? 'Cause if it leaks to the VC he could end up MIA, and then we'd all be put out in KP?

How I cheered when Airman Adrian Cronauer mocked Lt Steven Hauk's fondness for acronyms in *Good Morning, Vietnam*. Using jargon is an act of unconscionable self-indulgence. It is designed to make the user feel superior while saying not much, and Adrian, played by the late Robin Williams, spoke for millions of cheesed-off employees when he attacked it.

Jargon, acronyms and corporate-speak — all too common in offices — should be banned from schools. But to my horror (I am a teacher in an east London state school) over the decade I've been teaching, I've seen all sorts of horrible acronyms become common in both the staffroom and the classroom.

SEN, Progress 8, value added, IEP, EBD, FSM, ADD, ADHD, flight paths, EP and EAL. Unless you've studied the weird new education language, you haven't a hope of understanding what teachers — or other people in the education business — are on about, and I sometimes think this is the point. It means baffled parents, who don't know an FSM from an IEP, can't hold teachers to account. It's a far cry from the government's expressed aim of empowering parents and giving them choice.

But there's another, more alarming problem with jargon in education. It means complex problems are pigeonholed and oversimplified and, in the process, misdiagnosed. Take attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD). If this isn't a case of the concept leading the response, I don't know what is. Teachers, teaching assistants (TAs) and pastoral staff are forever stuffing children into the box marked ADHD. We tell the parents, who call the doctor, who prescribes the drugs. But children can be inattentive for a hundred more complicated reasons. If ADHD weren't available as a catch-all diagnosis, we'd have to try harder to understand each child.

English as an additional language (EAL) is another concept that drives practice. In my experience, many so-called EAL pupils speak excellent English, but now that there's a handy label, teachers are forever applying it to pupils. Once you're EAL, you'll be forced to have an IEP (individual education plan)

and if you fall a bit below your designated FP (flight path) you could end up in the humiliating SEN (special educational needs) category.

Just the existence of the phrase 'flight path' in schools is dangerous; it creates the false impression that pupils progress in a linear fashion. This can have unforeseen and deeply troubling consequences. If a pupil's making EP (expected progress) in, say, chemistry, or, better still, EP+1 (better progress than EP), he's on or above his designated FP (which is based on KS2 data — exhausting, isn't it?). When a teacher sees 'EP+1' he knows he no longer has to push the pupil. EP+1 means the child has exceeded his target. That he may be capable of getting an A grade becomes largely irrelevant. If his FP states an expected C,

*Through jargon, complex problems are pigeonholed and oversimplified and, in the process, misdiagnosed*

and the pupil received a B, the teacher has 'added value' and the school's statistics have benefited. So why push him any further? According to the law of the jargon it's unnecessary. Everyone's happy, aren't they?

No they're not. I've seen more than one instance of a pupil deciding, two years down the line, that he wants to aim higher. He wants to train as a doctor, say, but he can't because he needed that A in chemistry — and nobody pushed him. Management-speak and fancy-sounding acronyms create a world of false targets, when the real target should be the needs and desires of children.

My personal favourite is the word 'innovation'. Schools, in particular their 'senior leaders', have become obsessed with innovation. They demand innovation constantly, for the sake of innovating — so as to be seen to be 'thinking outside the box'. This means they alter anything and everything on a whim. In my last school, the length of the school day, the lesson times and the lunch break were all changed for no reason, just so as to innovate. You can imagine the chaos and confusion.

Once again, my school was responding to a fashion rather than the needs of the children. The jargon has become a tyranny rather than a tool. This must change. Oh for Airman Adrian Cronauer to teach us all to speak English again.

*Joe Baron is a pseudonym.*



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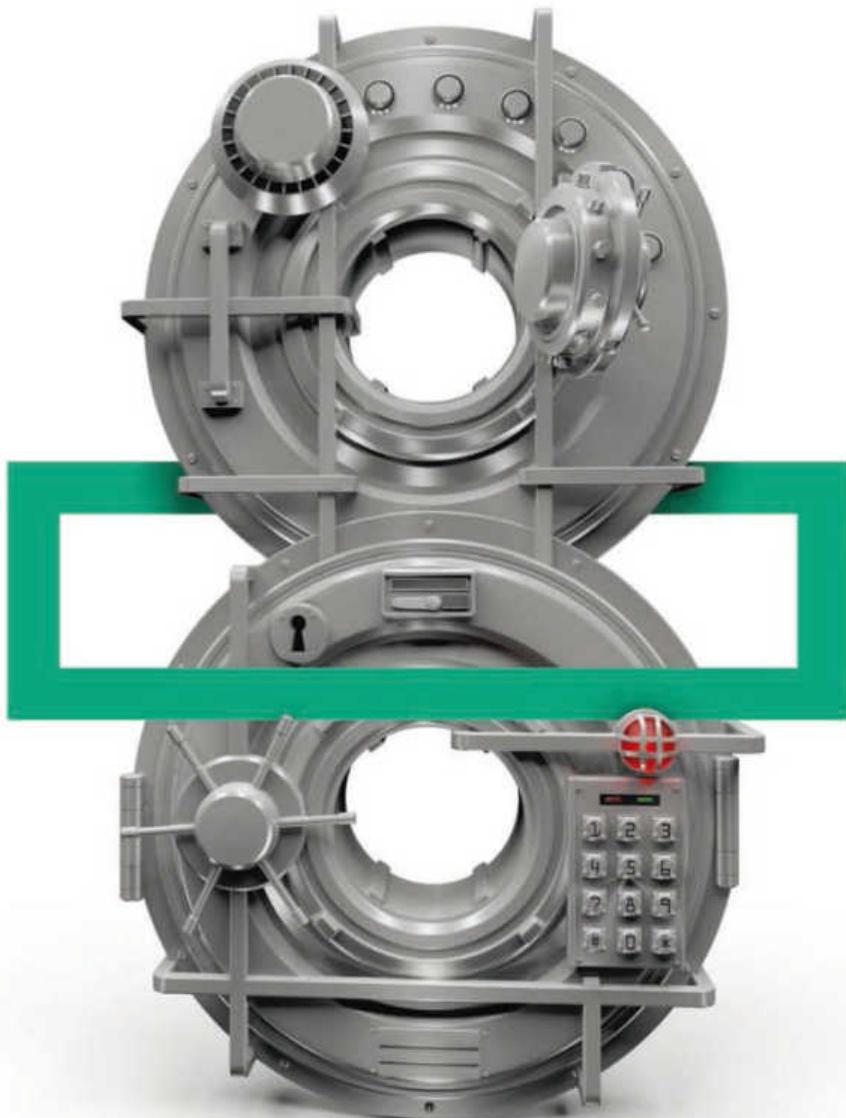
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# The war on pensioners

Young people are being taught to resent their elders on the basis of tendentious claims and alarmist statistics

MARY DEJEVSKY

**W**ho controls the media in Britain? Depending on your political outlook, you might answer: the Conservatives, the liberal-left chattering classes, Rupert Murdoch or the BBC. But if the coverage of the elderly is anything to go by, then we can perhaps agree on one thing: the headlines are decided by a cohort of 25- to 45-year-olds who believe that other people's parents and grandparents — a.k.a. Britain's pensioners — have stolen their future, dashed their dreams and nabbed all the plush property.

How else to account for a headline such as 'No pay rise? Blame the baby-boomers' gilded pension pots' and a plethora of articles maintaining that pensioners have 'never had it so good', at the expense of the young, who will be 'boomeranging' back to their childhood beds, too poor to buy a home until they are in their own straitened dotation. The source for one recent wave of generational alarmism was a report published by the Resolution Foundation, a generally laudable outfit which focuses on low incomes.

The Resolution Foundation has a new boss: David Willetts, a former Tory minister and a pioneer of generational jihad. Five years ago he wrote the set text on the subject, *The Pinch*, subtitled 'How the baby-boomers took their children's future — and why they should give it back'. Thankfully, he made little headway selling this argument to the Prime Minister and Chancellor, but his thesis suits his new thinktank, which has not been averse to a little granny-bashing.

But this was as nothing compared to the headlines generated by a recent report from that fount of economic truth, the Institute for Fiscal Studies, and a lecture by its director, Paul Johnson. Here is a taste: 'Pensioners earning more than the average worker' (*Independent*); 'Why pensioners are probably earning more than you are' (*City AM*); 'Pensioners have more cash than those in work' (*Times*). Again, we are invited to believe — in effect — that the young are broke because the old are rich.

The report argues that the increase in average pensioners' incomes since the crash has outstripped the increase in the income of working households — ergo, pensioners have been unfairly protected. It was the latest restatement of a familiar theme: Britain is now a gerontocracy, with the government shamelessly favouring the old over the young.

But this is only part — and a very partial part — of the story. While pensioners' income has risen more than that of workers, it rose from a much lower base. There is still a gap of around 25 per cent between the average worker's income (£28,000 a year) and that of the average pensioner (£21,000). The UK state pension languishes far below that provided in most developed countries, and it is all that many pensioners have to live on.

Some of the media reports got around those awkward facts by talking about 'net' income. Pensioners were deemed to be better off (even described in some reports as 'earning more') than the average worker because they were assumed to have lower outgoings, notably on housing costs and dependants.

This argument is bogus in almost every respect. Even if most of those receiving pen-

*Our state pension is far below that in most developed countries, and it is all many pensioners have to live on*

sions own their own homes, this does not relieve them of housing costs. They may no longer be paying a mortgage (at a time, by the way, when interest rates are the lowest they have been for more than a generation) but they still face maintenance bills on properties that are often older and more expensive to keep up than more recently built housing.

Those living in flats or private sheltered housing face service charges that have a habit of rising out of all proportion to the general level of inflation. And all this has to be paid out of incomes that are fixed — or, for fortunate ex-public sector employees, linked to what is currently a negligible rate of inflation.

Even if supermarket bills are falling because of greater competition, food and other costs tend to be higher for smaller households. Plus older people need services



'What's your carcinogen of the day?'

such as cleaning and care, which have to be paid for out of taxed income. Pensioners pay tax like anyone else. The NHS may be 'free', but declining faculties incur a host of other expenses, and means-testing excludes practically every homeowner, and a good many others, from council provision. The promised 'cap' on care costs has been postponed. How exactly are pensioners privileged?

Ah yes, the 'triple lock' — whose abolition is increasingly demanded by a vocal younger generation that regards it as an unaffordable luxury. This promise — that the state pension will rise every year in line with prices or wages or by 2.5 per cent, whichever is highest — sounds reassuring. But with inflation around zero, these rises go nowhere near compensating the retired for the dismal interest rates on their savings. The same applies to the annuities they were forced to take out (until this year, when some could supposedly opt for a Lamborghini instead).

If anyone deserves to feel aggrieved about the fallout from the financial crisis, it is not the young — who can still live on absurdly cheap credit. It is those who prudently saved for their retirement, only to face interest rates turning negative. And those same mollycoddled young have the nerve to resent the 'triple lock', which may limit some of the damage when inflation starts to turn up.

Most misleading and most pernicious in public relations terms, however, is the way in which the state pension is lumped together for government statistical and administrative purposes with benefits. A typical newspaper report will challenge the reader to estimate the biggest benefits charge on the public purse — teasing readers to say jobseekers' allowance, or housing, or some such — only to floor them with the fact that it is none of these ne'er-do-wells who are squandering public money, but your granny and grandad.

The state pension, they will say triumphantly, accounts for one third — and rising — of all welfare spending. Add public service pensions and other pensioner benefits, such as disability and (a tiny fraction) winter fuel, and practically half of welfare spending is on pensioners. Cue fury among the young, who erroneously conclude that they are paying.

The state pension is one of the last truly contributory payments. To present it as just another handout and part of a ballooning benefits bill is an invitation to the young to resent the amount spent even more — and to the recipients to feel that they are being patronised. The state pension should be separated from the overall benefits bill forthwith.

There are rich pensioners, as there have always been, and there are many more who, thank goodness, are less impoverished in retirement than their parents were. To infer from a general improvement, however, that your average pensioner today is in clover, compared with their unjustly cash-strapped heirs, is a travesty that quite dishonestly stokes the fires of generational strife.

## A marathon of cheats

Russian athletes may be stripped of the medals they won at the 2012 Olympics, but what of the earliest-known drug-taker in the modern Olympics? Thomas Hicks won the 1904 marathon in St Louis after taking two doses of brandy laced with strychnine. — Hicks collapsed on the finishing line and had to be revived. There being no rule at the time against drugs, he was allowed to keep his gold medal.

— Not so a man who reached the finishing line ahead of him, fellow American Fred Lorz. He was disqualified after admitting that he had taken a car most of the way.

## Police, camera, revenue

The police and crime commissioner for Bedfordshire is thinking of turning on speed cameras on the M1 24 hours a day. On which roads do most fatalities occur?

DEATH TOLL IN 2014	
Urban A roads	<b>339</b>
Urban B roads	<b>111</b>
Urban minor roads	<b>302</b>
Extra-urban A roads	<b>578</b>
Extra-urban B roads	<b>112</b>
Extra-urban minor roads	<b>131</b>
Motorways	<b>85</b>

## Roads to happiness

According to the Office of National Statistics, 880,000 of us spend at least three hours a day commuting to work. Does it make us happy? Here are scores on the government's new life-satisfaction measure, relative to people who commute up to 15 minutes a day.

16-30 mins	<b>-0.03</b>
31-45 mins	<b>-0.01</b>
46-60 mins	<b>-0.07</b>
61-90 mins	<b>-0.17</b>
91-179 mins	<b>-0.16</b>
More than 180 mins	<b>+0.07</b>

## Sporting shares

Premiership footballers have lost millions investing in property. Have fans who invested in football clubs fared any better? — Manchester United is quoted on the New York Stock Exchange, although the Glazer family continues to own 80% of the company. Investors could have bought the shares for \$14 each when issued in August 2012. Last week they were trading at just over \$18, a profit of **28%**. No dividend.

— Celtic is listed on the London Stock Exchange. Over five years its shares have produced a **69%** return and over ten years 79%. No dividend.

— Rangers was floated in 2000. Its shares were delisted from the Alternative Investment Market in April, making it hard for fans to realise any value remaining.

## Send in the clones

The super-rich are already bringing beloved dogs and horses back to life. Soon the rest of us will be able to do it too

CAMILLA SWIFT

**H**ow much do you love your dog? Do you secretly wish, as he or she grows older, that you could have another just the same? I'll bet that tens of thousands of Brits feel this way — and soon their dreams could come true.

When most of us last thought about it, cloning was an off-putting and futuristic prospect. Dolly the sheep was the poster girl, and things didn't turn out too well for her.

But times change, science creeps on, and last year a Brit called Rebecca Smith had her beloved dachshund, Winnie, cloned in South Korea. The going rate for Mini-Winnie would have been £60,000, but Rebecca won a competition and so — except for the obligation to appear in a TV documentary about the process — Mini came for free.

£60,000 sounds steep, but costs will almost certainly plummet, as they do with any new technology. And one reason we can be sure that cloning is the future is that it's already very much in the present.

Cloning is banned in the racing world — there's too much cash at stake, and too many opportunities for scams. But in polo, cloning a prized pony is becoming increasingly popular. One of the world's top players, Adolfo Cambiaso, has cloned dozens of his favourite horses with great success. Cambiaso is so keen that he has become a partner in a cloning company, Crestview, which has its own laboratory near Buenos Aires. One day, he's said, he'd like to play in an entire match that involves only cloned horses. They are turning out to be in hot demand. In 2010, a clone of one of Cambiaso's best horses, Cuartetera, sold for \$800,000.

Polo has set a precedent — and naturally other equestrian sports are clamouring to join in. The Olympics in Rio next year will theoretically be the first Games at which clones would be permitted to compete; equestrian sports' governing body, the FEI, changed its rules in 2012. A clone of Tamarillo — the event horse who competed with William Fox Pitt at the Athens Olympics, and who died this summer — was born two years ago, and although he would be too young for 2016, Tomatillo would be more than ready by 2020.

Poor Tomatillo may never get the chance, though — because breeding's where the money is. The original, Tamarillo, had been gelded and so couldn't pass on his genes naturally. There's every chance the clone, Toma-

tillo, will never even race. Instead, he'll be the sire Tamarillo couldn't be.

Because of the cash involved, horses often pioneer fertility treatments that are later used in humans. The major breakthroughs in freezing sperm first came from the need to transport the seed of equine champions overseas. There's even a story from the 1300s involving an Arab chief who stole semen from a stallion and used it to impregnate his own mare: the first artificial insemination. Embryo transfers were first carried out in horses in the early 1970s, so that a dam could continue her illustrious career undamaged by motherhood. This was almost a decade before the procedure was successfully used in humans. Back

*In polo, cloning a prized pony is becoming increasingly popular*

then embryo transfer was a controversial topic — people fretted and agonised over it, just as they do over cloning now.

Some worry that the clones of famous horses will be looked at simply as status symbols for the super-rich. You could own 'a Cuartetera' or 'a Tamarillo' in the same way that you can a Ferrari or a Lamborghini. But is that the real issue here?

More significantly, the success rate of cloning remains low, and animal-rights campaigners argue that the number of deformities, as well as the health problems that some clones still develop in later life, mean that it should be banned.

Then, even if all goes well and the technology advances, there's the sporting argument. Is cloning an animal that you know has great potential a gentlemanly way of behaving? Isn't it a little like betting on a certainty?

Cambiaso and his team hope so. 'She is not like Sage — she is Sage,' his right-hand man, Pablo Spinacci, has said of one of their clones. 'She is the same, they are the same.'

Interestingly, Rebecca Smith doesn't agree. Perhaps because Mini the cloned dachshund spent her first months in a lab, her character is 'slightly different' from her mother's. Mini is less laid back, says Rebecca.

Even so, as the cost of cloning plummets, a significant market is bound to emerge here. A dog, it turns out, is not just for life, but potentially for ever.



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# Here's what's wrong with the 'public sector ethos'



**A**n infuriating benefit of readers' online comments beneath the efforts of a columnist like me is that as you read the responses an understanding dawns of the column you ought to have written.

Some readers are stupid, unpleasant or obsessive; but most are not. As you learn their reactions you see where your argument was not clear, where you were short of information, and where you were simply wrong. But more than that, you sometimes tumble for the first time to where the nub of a problem that perhaps you danced around may lie.

Last Saturday I wrote for the *Times* about the self-righteousness of spokesmen for public services threatened by government cuts; about veiled threats by the police to stop policing, and by barristers enraged by cuts to legal aid. I wrote, too, about the British Medical Association's shroud-waving. My argument was that lots of people, employees in both the public and the private sector, provide services that are useful or even essential to the public, and that those who work in the public sector should claim no special moral right to be spared the consequences of austerity.

The column drew a big response — impassioned both for and against my case. As I read on over the weekend, the uncomfortable realisation dawned that the root of the problem was something Conservatives like me are rather supposed to approve of and are inclined to pray in aid of our case. It's called 'the public service ethos'.

The idea is variously expressed. We talk about the public service 'ideal'; the special sense of duty that (we suggest) ought to actuate teachers, nurses, and all who work for the public good. We insinuate that theirs is a calling rather than just a job; that money shouldn't loom large among their ambitions; that feelings of responsibility to those who depend on their work should be more highly developed among them than among those employed in profit-making organisations; indeed that 'profit' is almost a dirty word in their line of business. I've noticed in London Underground carriages an advertisement for Transport for London whose message is that TfL is not a profit-making outfit — the implication being that we ought therefore to admire its endeavours more. And this from a Conservative Mayor of London.

As with the organisation, so with those who serve it: drivers of not-for-profit Tube trains, nurses in NHS hospitals, teachers in state schools, barristers taking briefs from legal-aid defendants, are thought to inhabit a subtly but distinctly higher moral plane than their equivalents in (say) private hospitals, airlines or independent schools. They begin to believe it of themselves.

So when Conservative politicians inveigh against junior doctors who might, by striking, 'put patients' lives at risk'; or firemen or ambulance men whose industrial action might place ordinary citizens in jeopardy, or RMT members who by bringing the railways to a halt might inconvenience members of the travelling public, they are feeding the

*We insinuate that public service is a calling rather than just a job, and that money shouldn't loom large*

cultural meme that those who provide public services have special moral responsibilities to their customers. They are also (perhaps unwittingly) contributing to the idea that for public sector workers, virtue is, if not entirely its own reward, at least a reward that compensates for somewhat lower wages.

Were I a Marxist, I would argue that capitalist society has invented the idea of the public service ethos in order to get more out of workers for lower wages. Not being a Marxist, I confine myself to remarking that this paternalistic view of the state sector tends to substitute a sense of duty for the desire to enrich yourself; a substitution that's highly convenient to the employer.

Time and again in the online comments for my column, contributors who work in the

public sector have been assuring their readers that they embarked on their careers with the ideal of service, rather than money, foremost in their minds. And can you blame them? Isn't this what our culture has been teaching them? Isn't this the reward that we've suggested they should prefer to higher wages?

Perhaps, then, we should think again before tut-tutting when junior doctors, hospital workers and schoolteachers wag their fingers at Tory ministers and paint horrifying pictures of the suffering the public they serve will endure if this or that proposed cut goes ahead. Have we not fed that mentality by suggesting that they shouldn't be in it for themselves, but for those who depend on them?

I wonder whether the 'public service ethos' does more harm than good. Used, variously, as an argument against trying to measure the value of public sector activity ('these things can't be expressed in crude figures'), trying to impose efficiency reforms ('bean-counters can't understand the value of what we do') and against virtually any cuts to any public service at all ('we're not doing this for profit but because we know people need us'), a central belief in many public servants' minds is that they are working for the greater good and have no vested interests of their own, and are therefore above the selfish arguments of the rest of us. This poisons rational consideration of costs and benefits in the public sector.

Anyone who has worked in a charity will be familiar with the rancid element that can be introduced into any co-operative endeavour by the consciousness of every comrade that he or she is doing this for love, not money. God spare those who want to get things done efficiently from the spirit of voluntarism. The public service ideal conveys a subtle hint of voluntarism, encouraging a sense of grievance that workers' efforts are not properly appreciated or supported — a grievance writ large, for example, among the teachers' unions.

Samuel Johnson remarked that no man was more innocently employed than when making money. Perhaps he overstated; but a weekend spent in the (virtual) company of public sector workers who feel the world misunderstands and undervalues them has left me close to recommending this mission statement for the public sector: 'A job, not a vocation.'



# The answer for sensible, moderate Labour folk is simple. Just leave



**W**hat a useless shower the Labour party is right now. What a sniveling dance of fools. And I don't just mean the new lot, under Jeremy Corbyn, although his ongoing decision to surround himself with a team of people who seem to have each been tasked, individually, with emphasising a different bad thing about him does take some beating. I mean the whole train set, radicals and moderates alike. This is a party, right now, reaping what it has sown, which is piety, tribalism and a sort of overweening preachiness. And now, to mix my metaphors, it is getting bitten by all of them.

Last week, Labour suspended a man called Andrew Fisher, who was, and remains, Jeremy Corbyn's head of policy. It might sound odd, that 'and remains' bit, but don't blame me. Fisher, inasmuch as I can make out, is mainly tasked with reminding people that although the new leader looks like a genial Captain Birdseye, he actually hails from a section of the party that hates almost everybody else, even more than the rest of it hates almost everybody else, which is saying something.

Fisher's more recent crime, though, was party disloyalty, via tweets. In part, this involved calling the Miliband shadow cabinet 'the most abject collection of complete shite', although having met people who were actually in the Miliband shadow cabinet who would have merrily called it much the same, I'd say this seems wholly forgivable.

More dangerous was his endorsement of the Class War candidate in Croydon South. Fisher now claims this was a joke, and may even be telling the truth, because only Oxbridge trustafarians from west London support Class War these days. No matter. Article something of Labour's terribly important something or other declares that anybody Labour who joins or supports somebody who isn't Labour can't be Labour any more. That's that.

Fisher's sins were brought to light by Emily Benn, who was the Croydon South Labour candidate he jokingly told people not to vote for. She was 12,000 votes short of victory, although I don't think she can

blame the Class War guy for that, because he only got 65 of them. Amusingly, anyway, it now turns out that Benn herself had done something similar, by retweeting a suggestion that people who disliked Corbyn's male-dominated cabinet should consider joining Sandi Toksvig's Women's Equality Party.

Action against Fisher was also demanded by Simon Danczuk, which has led in turn to Ken Livingstone demanding that Danczuk himself be kicked out of Labour, because he keeps writing beastly things about Corbyn in the *Mail on Sunday*. That's Ken Livingstone, of course, who had to actively run against the

*This is what happens when you brainwash yourself into believing that your lot are the only good guys*

Labour candidate in a London mayoral election to get kicked out of his party, but was let back in anyway after he'd won.

What is wrong with these people? It's like they're children. Part of the madness comes, I suppose, from social media, whereby every utterance is 'campaigning', even if you're just doing it in the office, on the loo. The bulk of it, though, is the idea that Labour people have to be Labour forever, even if they completely disagree with Labour, or else they're not Labour. It's weird and it's needy and it's anti-intellectual, and it makes no sense at all. They went big on this during the leadership elec-

tion, when a host of people with politics virtually indistinguishable from Jeremy Corbyn's were kicked out on the basis of prior support for the Greens or the Scots Nats. Because, of course, if they were true Labour they'd support Labour even while disagreeing with Labour, because that's what Labour does.

Why does it? Nobody else behaves like this. Nobody else turns party into a tribe, not just putting loyalty over policy, but feigning a virtue with it, too. In any other party, anyone who disagreed with the party line as often as Corbyn has might have been expected to resign at least once, if only out of embarrassed deference to the voters who had blithely ticked the 'Labour' box. Perhaps due to its history, though, Labour is not merely a jumble of policies in the manner of other parties. Labour is a 'movement' and if you aren't with it, you're against it. No matter which direction it currently happens to be moving in.

This is what keeps all those moderate Labour folk — sensible people, people I like, people who'd rather vomit on themselves in public than go on Russia Today, people who could totally be trusted to run a country without accidentally breaking it or losing it or allying it with Hezbollah — so hopelessly shackled to a party with a leadership none of them agree with about anything. They won't shift Corbyn anytime soon, because the members won't let them. They know full well that almost everybody in Britain who would ever vote for him already has. Yet they stay.

This is what happens when you brainwash yourself into believing that your lot are the only good guys; when you forget that it's not the club that matters, but what the club does. This is what happens when you grow so used to feeling superior to everybody outside Labour that you can no longer properly believe such people are proper, moral humans at all. It's not a church. It's not a sin to go somewhere else for a bit if you need to. Not when the nuts do it, and not when you do either. Pull yourselves together. People are laughing.



'Hi! Oh, nothing really, just socialising.'

Hugo Rifkind is a writer for the Times.



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## The C of E should apologise

Sir: Peter Hitchens's article on the allegations against the late Bishop Bell is a welcome intervention in a sorry affair ('Justice for Bishop Bell', 7 November). If the best evidence against Bishop Bell was sufficient only to merit his arrest (were he alive), then the recent statements concerning him issued by the church authorities should be withdrawn; if they have better evidence, then that should be published.

It should not be forgotten that this is not the first time this year that senior figures in the Church of England have made dubious accusations of child abuse against the dead. Earlier this year the Bishop of Durham saw fit to announce that he had passed to the police the names of Lord Whitelaw and Enoch Powell as suspects in child abuse cases. No evidence has ever emerged to support these claims. Nevertheless, the Bishop of Durham has not yet apologised to the Whitelaw and Powell families for any distress he may have caused them.

The Church of England was once able to boast bishops with the moral stature of George Bell; now it seems to produce only mitred Tom Watsons.

*Colin Armstrong  
Belfast*

## No obligations to Ukraine

Sir: I do not often disagree with Con Coughlin, and I agree with most of what he says about our defence policy and priorities ('An indefensible truth', 7 November). But he is wrong when he writes about our sending '100 or so military advisers to Kiev to help train government forces'. We have no obligations to Ukraine at all, and we have no business to be sending any troops there. Ukraine is not a member of Nato or the EU, and if we persist then we can hardly object if Putin sends 75 or 100 advisers to Scotland on the invitation of Nicola Sturgeon or Alex Salmond — which is quite possible. The situation is different in Poland and the Baltic states: they are our allies.

*Chris Minter  
London SW6*

## Unconventional threats

Sir: Con Coughlin confuses size with effect in his analysis of our military needs. The examples of Iraq, Afghanistan, Libya were all effective in their offensive phase, but failures in creating peace. To talk of boots on the ground is to fight yesterday's wars.

The lesson of our 21st-century adventures is that offence is not the issue — rebuilding is. We should recognise that only Russia and China could present

feasible threats to our nation's security of the sort that would require conventional defence. Most coming threats are not conventional. They are communications-led, remote and singular in their delivery. Perhaps GCHQ should be treated as our 'Queen Elizabeth Class' defence platform.

*Mark Bexon  
Lewes, East Sussex*

## Poets, not luvvies

Sir: I enjoyed James Delingpole's mockery of our omniscient luvvies (7 November). But Coleridge and Wordsworth 'luvvies'? Coleridge was a poet, metaphysical philosopher, sage and sometime political adviser to the governor of Malta. Wordsworth was, at the least, a half-decent poet. A step up from today's narcissistics.

*Revd Dr Peter Mullen  
Eastbourne, East Sussex*

## Is 'creativity' necessary?

Sir: Nicholas Serota (Letters, 7 November) argues about the importance of 'creativity' in education. His view appears to be echoed by the headmaster of Eton; but is creativity

a necessary part of a child's education? Jacques Barzun, the French intellectual and polymath, would have found this idea lamentable. His book *House of Intellect* provides an excellent analysis of the state of modern education, describing the alarming lack of intellectual rigour in schools, as the focus has shifted away from teaching 'difficult' subjects to teaching 'softer' ones, in which every child must be seen to succeed. The demand for excellence has all but disappeared. He wrote it in 1959.

*Barrie Mitelman  
Westcliff, Essex*

## Wow and wah

Sir: Barry Humphries deplores the abuse of the expletive 'Wow' (Diary, 31 October), but it is far from being a contemporary vice. The Mughal Emperor Jehangir, on his way back to Kabul in 1607, is said to have been so struck by the beauty of the ponds and waterfalls near a village on what is now the Grand Trunk Road, that he exclaimed 'Wah' — giving it the name that survives today.

*James Blount  
London W10*

## Vulgarians at home

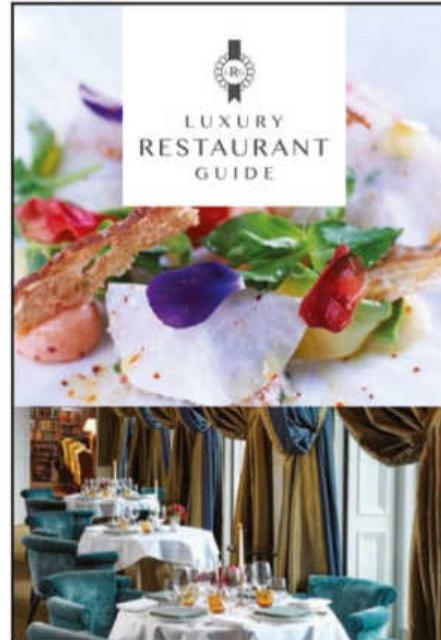
Sir: Taki should delight in the fact that the 'vulgarians' have swimming pools, cocktail bars, gyms, cinemas and other such in their homes (High Life, 7 November). It means the vulgar rich will stay put, and he will not have to encounter them elsewhere.

*Edward Windham-Bellord  
Cucklington, Somerset*

## Grammar prize

Sir: Out of 29 attempts at my grammar test (Diary, 17 October), all of them classy by the standards of today's general competence in grammar, a single one combined being error-free with being sufficiently exact to exclude any ambiguity. This was submitted by David Mackie, who accordingly, courtesy of *The Spectator*, will shortly be receiving the prize of a bottle of Pol Roger. Shortly after submitting his entry, Mr Mackie sent me an email mainly devoted to disputing one of the elaborated answers that I put on my website at the same time as I gave my 'bare-bones' answers in last week's *Spectator* (7 November). And so interesting and well argued is what he said that I have added this email of his to the relevant page of my website ([gwynneteaching.com](http://gwynneteaching.com)) for the enlightenment of anyone fancies some brain-sharpening reading.

*N.M. Gwynne  
Co. Wexford, Ireland*



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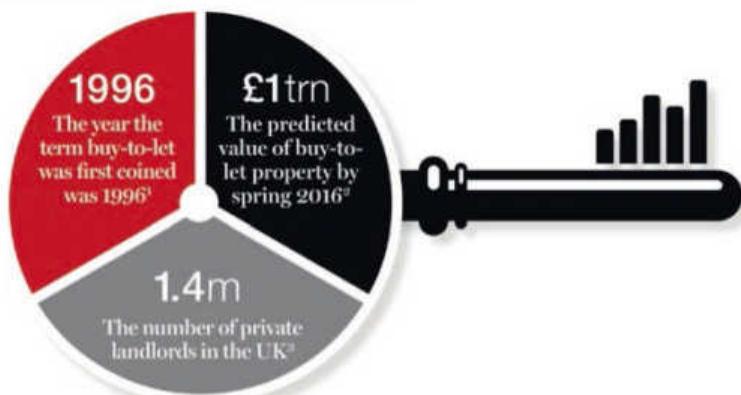
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# IS THE BUY-TO-LET BOOM OVER?

Ever since George Osborne stunned the nation by announcing that those aged 55 and over would be able to spend, save or invest their pension pots as they please there has been intense interest in how people will use their retirement savings. Some of the most fevered speculation has focused on Britain's buy-to-let market with claims that 'pension freedoms' would encourage a flood of money into the sector.

In an era of low savings rates and volatile stock markets, the lure of property as a 'safe investment' remains strong. One in five pension holders with investable assets of over £100,000 surveyed by YouGov on Brewin Dolphin's behalf said they planned to rely on buy-to-let investments in retirement. That's no surprise to Stephen Ford, Head of Wealth and Investment Management at Brewin Dolphin. 'The ease with which you can take £70,000, add some lending to it, and buy a house – compared to putting £50,000 into the stock market – are very different experiences, and I can understand why lots of people stick to the perceived simple assets like property.'

## The Buy-to-Let Boom



1. Source: Paragon 18 Years of Buy-to-Let 2. Source: Kent Reliance The Kent Reliance Buy-to-Let Britain report  
3. Source: National Landlords Association

Soaring house prices mean many of Britain's estimated 1.4 million landlords have profited handsomely in recent years. But market movements have not all been in landlords' favour.

As capital growth has outpaced the uplift in rents, yields have been under pressure. A decade ago landlords were generating gross rental yields – the rent received before letting costs as a percentage of the property's purchase price – of up to 10%. Now the average is around 5%.

Despite this drop, buy-to-let has remained affordable thanks to low mortgage rates. The National Landlords Association estimates that those with buy-to-let mortgages spend 28% of their rental income meeting repayments. For the average homeowner mortgage payments swallow around a third of take home pay. On this measure borrowing is as affordable as it was in 2004, even though average house prices have risen by nearly 40%.

Anyone pondering the idea of putting their savings into a rental property should be aware of a range of challenges that could threaten their profitability.

Life as a landlord involves much more than just collecting rent. 'It's great buying property in your 50s or your 60s, but trying to run a buy-to-let portfolio when you're in your 70s or 80s is a completely different dynamic,' says Ford.

## How will you spend your pension in retirement?



of pension savers plan to withdraw money from their pension to invest in property



plan to withdraw money to spend it on a holiday



intend to use it to pay off existing debts



want to invest in a classic car

And then, of course, there is tax. Rents are taxed as income, selling a property will likely trigger capital gains tax and passing a property onto your children could result in an inheritance tax bill. Drastic changes announced in the Budget that will curb the tax relief landlords receive on mortgage interest payments could cause havoc for buy-to-let investors.

## WHAT DOES THE FUTURE HOLD?

'I think the government is realising that we have a huge amount of wealth trapped in property, and if we can get some of that into the equity market it would lower the cost of doing business,' says Ford. 'With the changes in the last Budget, we're seeing property put on a much more equal footing to other assets.'

The Chancellor dealt landlords another blow by tightening the rules on the generous wear-and-tear allowance. At present, landlords can automatically take 10% from their pre-tax rental income to cover wear and tear. From next April, landlords will only be able to claim a

deduction for costs they actually incur.

Nor should landlords rely on record low mortgage rates to scrape through when the tax cuts hit. When rates do move they are likely to increase slowly, but even a small uplift could impact profitability.

For investors counting on capital growth there are also reasons for concern. The ratio of house prices to earnings is above its long-term average. On this gauge property is overvalued, so house price growth is vulnerable to a slowdown.

Does this mean buy-to-let is a bad investment? There is still money to be made if you put in the time and effort, or take professional advice. However, you need to make sure that your risk is well balanced – diversification is key.

'The first rule is eggs and baskets,' agrees Ford. 'But while you shouldn't put all of your money into equities, bonds, cash or property, there is a place for all of this stuff. My worry is whether investors are looking strategically. If you had a 30% allocation of buy-to-let in your portfolio ten years ago, that may well be 40%

today. Maybe now is the time to rebalance and reallocate your investments, and look at cheaper assets.'

Pensions provide a way of growing and using a retirement fund in a systematic and tax-efficient way, but the rules are complex and it is important to seek advice.

The new freedoms, which include the ability to draw a 25% lump sum tax free and use the rest to buy an annuity or use flexi-access drawdown, have made them more flexible, while the scrapping of the 55% death tax enables you to pass on your pension fund in a tax-efficient manner. Please remember any tax allowances or thresholds mentioned are based on personal circumstances and current legislation which can change.

Buy-to-let property may appear a simple option, and while it can play an important part in an investment portfolio and a central role in retirement planning, there is the risk of being over-exposed to a single sector.

When the Office for National Statistics last ran the numbers it found that around 37% of the nation's wealth is already wrapped up in property. The trouble is that many investors fixate on property to the detriment of everything else. That way danger lies.

*The value of investments can fall and you may get back less than you invested.*

*Any tax allowances or thresholds mentioned are based on personal circumstances and current legislation which is subject to change.*

*No investment is suitable in all cases and if you have any doubts as to an investment's suitability then you should contact us.*

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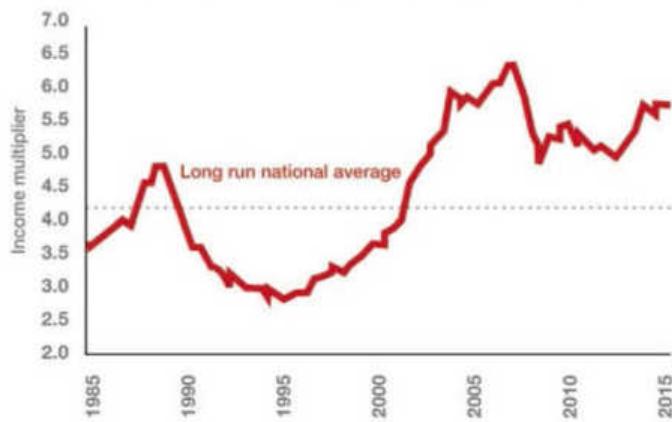
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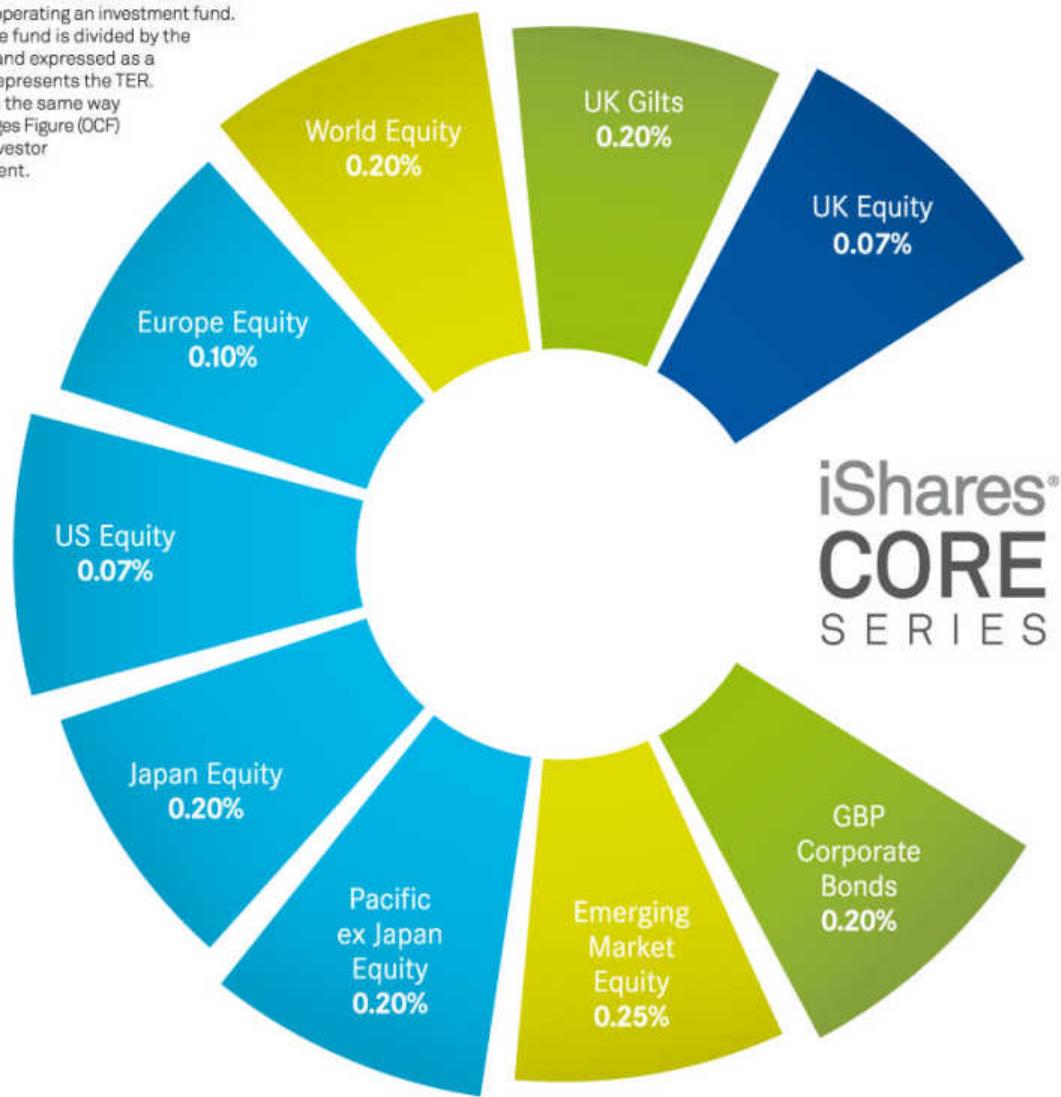
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## House prices as a proportion of income



Source: Nationwide ONS

Percentages indicate the Total Expense Ratio (TER) which is a measure of the total costs associated with managing and operating an investment fund. The total cost for the fund is divided by the fund's total assets and expressed as a percentage which represents the TER. This is calculated in the same way as the Ongoing Charges Figure (OCF) shown in the Key Investor Information Document.



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# Whodunnit this time: the Chinese man behind the curtain or the central banker on the sofa?



Like the Christmas pudding sampled by Hercule Poirot at Kings Lacey — but six weeks early — our *Spectator Money* supplement contains a little treasure in every portion, and perhaps even a priceless gem. I particularly commend the essays by Warwick Lightfoot and Subitha Subramaniam on interest rates, and why central banks have become so hesitant to raise them. In recent days we've had an indication from Mark Carney of the Bank of England that UK rates will stay at their current low well into next year, maybe until 2017; in the US, strong job numbers have pumped expectations that the first rate rise for nine years will be delivered by Fed chairman Janet Yellen in December. But if she does so, the increase will most probably be wafer-thin, and as Lightfoot says, there are always likely to be external factors — such as worries about China — that will keep the pace of tightening timid for some time to come.

If US rates creep up but UK rates stand still, the pound will fall against the dollar, temporarily boosting exports, but pressure on Carney to fall into line will rise. As Subramaniam writes, this enigmatic governor has confused markets with contradictory messages: 'In a world of increasing uncertainty, his lack of vision is unnerving.' In a decade's time, when the Poirots of punditry summon the suspects into the drawing room to establish who was responsible for the crash that followed the recovery, there may be a Chinaman hiding behind the curtain; but the central bankers who hesitated too long will be lined up on the sofa looking guilty.

## The game goes on

Money-brokering, when I saw it in action a generation ago, was an unsophisticated City game. It was mostly about matching banks with surplus dollar deposits to smaller banks that needed three- or six-month funding to make Eurodollar loans to state borrowers in Latin America and elsewhere. The mechanisms were simple, no one worried about counterparty risk, and the brokers were

Essex blokes who courted junior bankers like me by taking us to a basement restaurant in Basinghall Street presided over by a near-topless dame called Big Val.

But there were some clever people in the market. The up-and-comer was Michael Spencer, who went on to build Icap, the world's largest 'interdealer broker' and the source of the £700 million fortune with which he helps sustain the Conservative party. The old fox (now retired) was Derek Tullett, whose firm Tullett & Riley became part of Terry Smith's Collins Stewart group in 2003 and whose name survives at Tullett Prebon, Icap's biggest rival. The big City story this week is the sale of Icap's voice-brokering (old-fashioned phone-based) business to Tullett Prebon for around £1 billion.

Behind this consolidation is the post-crash shrinkage of the interbank market combined with the complexity of 21st-century finance: now everyone's terrified of counterparty risk, regulators are all over it, and the clever stuff is done by computers. Tullett Prebon can achieve economies of scale as the dominant player in what's left of voice-brokering, while Icap — whose remaining activities are chiefly in electronic broking — repositions itself as a fashionable 'fintech' (financial technology) brand whose shares should command a higher market rating and might attract takeover interest. Fings ain't what they used to be, but the game goes on.

## Mixed postbag

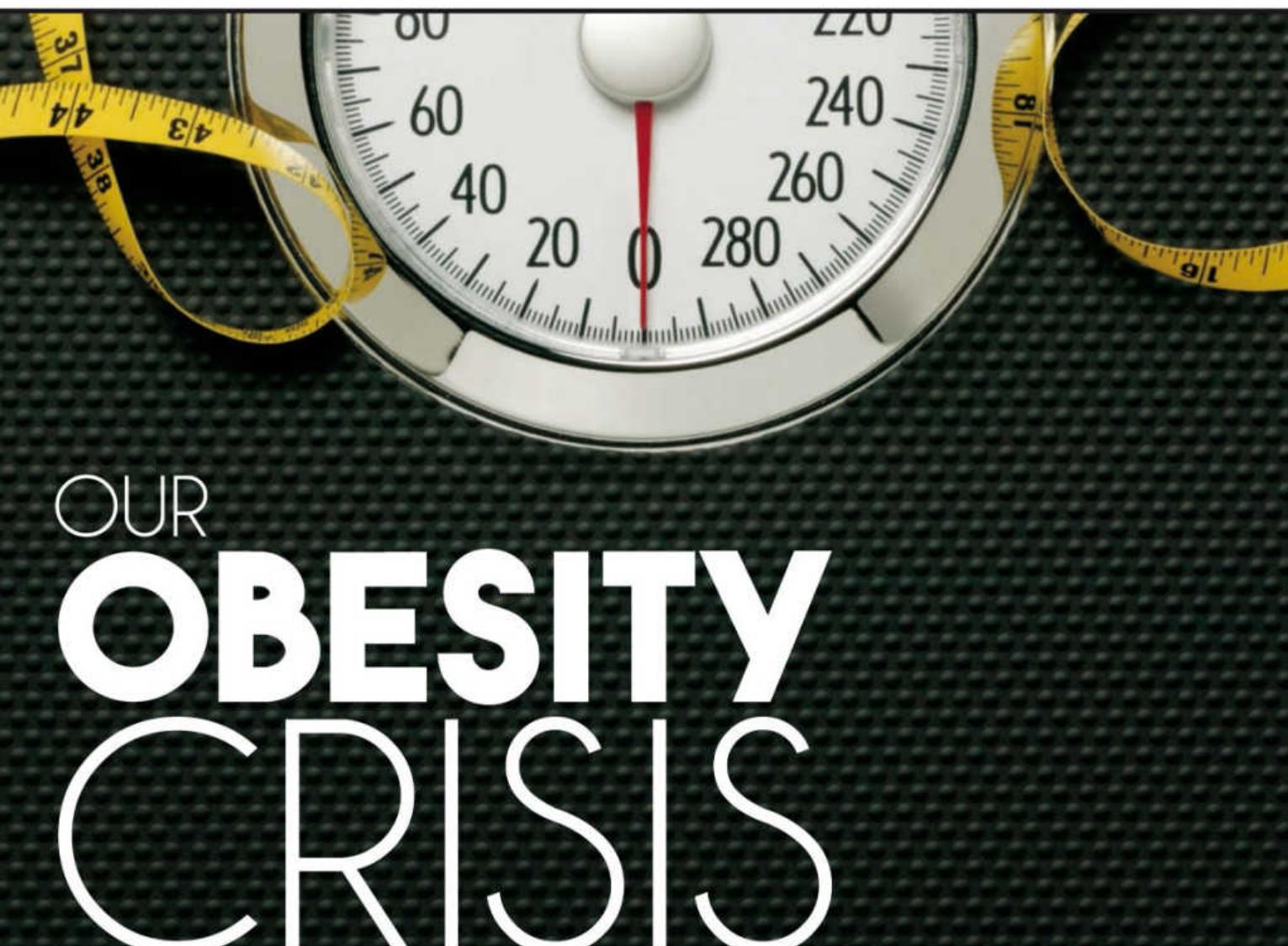
Contrasting responses to my call for your experiences of opening bank accounts for start-ups. There were black marks for Coutts ('Horrendous: the form-filling was beyond the pale, the jargon impenetrable') and Metro Bank ('Supposed to be the most welcoming... but I've spent two weeks completing the forms and dealing with questions about my identity... still can't invoice my first client'). On the positive side, there were bouquets for Santander ('An unsecured overdraft of £10,000 against my personal guarantee and nothing else') and Yorkshire

Bank ('Hassle-free, friendly, efficient... the Yorkshire lass on the phone was extraordinarily pleasant'). An 85-year-old reader emails to say she has no plans to start a business but if she did she wouldn't use HSBC online, which she finds 'incomprehensible and generally life-shortening'. More stories please, to martin@spectator.co.uk.

## Novelty shock

There was also an interesting follow-on to my item about 'blockchains', those online databases behind cryptocurrencies such as bitcoin that suddenly seem to be moving into the 'fintech' mainstream. In comes news that Seedrs, a leader of the UK's fast-growing equity crowdfunding scene, is offering private investors a chance to 'gain exposure to this fast-moving disruptive technology space' via an initial public offering of shares in Consilium — a venture capital firm that has built 'a portfolio of interests in 11 blockchain fintech-related companies'. Overall investment in the blockchain-and-bitcoin biz is forecast to hit \$786 million in 2015, by the way, more than double the figure for 2014; a bandwagon is rolling.

I do hope this concatenation of baffling novelty doesn't feel too life-shortening to read; let me reassure my elderly reader that writing about it diminishes, just a little, my own will to live. Daily we're bombarded with glimpses of alternative futures ('Royal Mail to pilot drone deliveries in rural areas' was another of this week's revelations, matching *Spectator Money*'s cover story about the advent of 'robot' investment advisers) but we can never tell which will be the new normal. Old-timer that I seem to have become, I'm reminded of a 1960s Bob Newhart sketch — you can find it on another novelty, YouTube — about Sir Walter Raleigh bringing tobacco back from the New World and trying to explain it: 'Then whaddaya do after you roll it up, Walt? Don't tell me, you stick it in your ear! No? Between your lips? And you SET FIRE TO IT! Walt, you gotta be kidding me!'



# OUR OBESITY CRISIS

## A COMPLEX ISSUE WITH NO SILVER BULLET

Obesity is one of the greatest health issues of modern-day Britain. Many say that we're in the midst of an obesity crisis, with up to 64 per cent of adults in the UK either overweight or obese. Despite the prevalence of this problem and the years of research into it, it's still an issue that is hugely misunderstood.

In the last decade, the buck has passed from foodstuff to foodstuff. Once upon a time it was butter and saturated fats that were to blame. Processed meats and salt have also been in the spotlight — but now it's sugar that's

being identified as the main culprit behind the nation's obesity epidemic. Sugar is such an enemy that the Health Select Committee has been recommended to introduce a sugar tax. But do we know enough about the facts behind Britain's obesity epidemic to point the finger of blame so firmly at sugar alone?

Whilst eating well is vital for all-round health, a new study published by 2020health suggests that focusing on diet alone cannot solve the obesity crisis. It highlights a wider set of factors behind the nation's epidemic — some of them predictable, other less so.

When giving evidence to the Health Select Committee's recent Childhood Obesity Inquiry, Professor Graham McGregor said that 'poor and socially deprived people are the ones that get obese'. This tends to be generally accepted as true – but what 2020health's study showed is that while socio-economic factors do play a large role in whether or not a person is obese, it is not as simple as all that. The evidence that links lower socio-economic groups to obesity is still overwhelming – but other groups are now beginning to experience the same rapidly rising rates of obesity.

Obesity levels amongst middle-class, middle-aged men have increased dramatically. Previously, women were generally viewed as more likely to become obese than men, but 2020health's review of the evidence shows that men are quickly catching up and that obesity rates between the sexes are now nearly equal. Obesity rates remain higher for women at the lower end of the socio-economic scale, but amongst the wealthy, men are more likely to become obese. As statistics such as this change, we need to factor these in to our future health policies.

Whilst the types of people who become obese are changing, the 2020health study indicated that altering personal circumstances affect obesity levels too. People who are experiencing uncertainty or personal instability also have a tendency towards obesity. It's not just those whose lives are changing for the worse, either. For the economically mobile – whether moving upwards or downwards – there are higher rates of obesity than in those who are stable in their place in the economic system, whatever that place may be.

Linking obesity solely to socio-economic factors and gender is to simplify the matter enormously. The latest study reveals just how important people's local environments – both at work and at home – can be to obesity rates. The factors that influence obesity do vary dependent on gender, however. In men, for example, the presence of large numbers of fast-food outlets near their workplace has a large effect on obesity rates. In fact in their earlier research paper 'Careless eating costs lives,' 2020health calls for a licensing system for fast-food outlets. It has also been revealed that lack of green space can be a contributory factor to obesity in young women. Mental health issues can also influence people's weight and the study

showed that half of all people with psychosis are obese.

Essentially, what this study shows is that it's not as simple as blaming sugar, or saying that socially deprived people with excess levels of sugar in their diet are those most likely to become obese. A vast number of factors can determine whether a person becomes obese — from age, gender and geographic location, to whether or not they smoke, and the presence of mental illness.

So is a sugar tax the answer? Excess amounts of sugar are certainly not a good thing, but the problem is that many other factors are being overlooked, which could unintentionally make the problem worse. Focusing solely on sugar in soft drinks – or indeed on any individual sector or solution – will never solve the problem of Britain's obesity crisis.

The reasons behind why some of us get fat and others don't are wide-ranging, and our response to obesity needs to reflect that. Sugar and diet are part of the problem – as are socio-economic factors – but they're not the only things that need to be taken into account.

At the moment the nation's obesity crisis is weighing down our NHS, economy, and welfare system, and something needs to be done. Emergency COBRA-style meetings might sound dramatic, but they could be the only way to give the crisis the necessary high profile and status required to deliver an effective strategy. Successive governments have failed time and time again to tackle the problem, and it is only getting worse.

Who becomes obese, and why they do, is a complex issue, and fighting the battle against obesity is a difficult challenge, but it's one that needs to be both fought and won for the benefit of everyone, obese or not. Focusing on single issues, however, is never going to be the answer. In their 2014 'Careless eating...' report 2020health recommended that government policy should satisfy an 'obesity test,' and it is clear that this cross-departmental and holistic approach is necessary to end this health crisis once and for all.

2020health conducted the research with the support of an unrestricted educational grant from AB Sugar. The views and opinion within the report and this feature do not necessarily reflect those of AB Sugar.



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# BOOKS & ARTS



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Alexander Calder in his Roxbury studio, 1941,  
Martin Gayford – p68

**Alexander Masters** reckons that being a friend of an author can make one his most perceptive critic  
**Rose Prince** reviews recipes from braised Pilot Whale to Toad-in-the-hole

**Patrick Skene Catling** compares Concorde to the twin-engined Marauders he navigated in the war  
**James Delingpole** wishes London Spy contained less shagging and more killing

**Kate Chisholm** is shocked to hear a claim that Bach is 'tasteless and chaotic'  
**Lloyd Evans** wonders if the Royal Court knows the difference between innovation and error



## Books of the Year

*Our regular reviewers choose the best and most overrated books of 2015*

### Anna Aslanyan

My top title of the year is *Satin Island* by Tom McCarthy (Cape, £16.99), convincing proof that the best writers of our time are anthropologists, and that James Joyce, were he alive today, would be working for Google. I also enjoyed Ben Lerner's *10:04* (Granta, £14.99), a self-deconstructing novel whose metafictional plot speaks of the nature of time and of things being endlessly interconnected. My non-fiction pick is Iain Sinclair's *London Overground: A Day's Walk Around the Ginger Line* (Hamish Hamilton, £16.99), the psychogeographer's passionate take on 21st-century London, a place of perpetual change and chronological resonances.

For the most overrated books of the year, see the 'hatchet issue' of the *London Review of Books* (24 September), featuring reviews of *Purity* by Jonathan Franzen (Fourth Estate, £20) and *A Little Life* by Hanya Yanagihara (Picador, £16.99).

### Michela Wrong

The highlight for me this year was the South African writer Jonny Steinberg's *A Man of Good Hope* (Cape, £18.99), hugely topical at a time when Europe is contemplating what it means to be a refugee. I've repeatedly found myself recommending it to friends. Steinberg is a novelist camouflaging himself as a non-fiction writer, and his

story of Somali tradesman Asad's meandering journey across Africa — from the clan violence of Mogadishu via the slums of Nairobi and Addis Ababa to the townships of Cape Town and their vindictive, xenophobic attacks — is extraordinarily poignant. A real-life picaresque tale, it doesn't contain a single dull sentence.

*Shame* (Weidenfeld, £14.99), a second novel by Melanie Finn, deserved more recognition than it received. The story of a young woman who exiles herself to a remote village in Tanzania after an accidental killing in Switzerland, only to be tracked down by a former neighbour bent on revenge, it's both disturbing and ultimately uplifting. Her Africa is one I recognise, neither sentimental nor sensationalised. Finn has a light, deft touch as a writer, but the images she conjures up are so subversively creepy they haunt you for days.

Morten Jerven, author of the iconoclastic *Poor Numbers* in 2013 — a book which argued that not a single GDP statistic in Africa could be trusted — continued his assault on economic shibboleths with the publication of *Africa: Why Economists Get It Wrong* (Zed Books, £14.99), which argues that the 'Africa Rising' mantra chanted by would-be investors in the continent has been built on a foundation of false assumptions.

Tom Burgis's *The Looting Machine* (William Collins, £16), the first book by this *Financial Times* journalist, offers another

corrective to current obligatory optimism about the continent. It's a bleak account of the resource smash-and-grab being staged by corrupt political elites and their corporate raider friends. China comes out of this account particularly poorly. An important book with a disconcertingly grim message.

### Thomas W. Hodgkinson

*Going Clear: Scientology, Hollywood, & the Prison of Belief* by Lawrence Wright (Vintage). Originally published in the US, this history of scientology isn't available in UK bookshops. Buy it online. Hilarious, hair-raising and amazingly evenhanded, given the subject matter, it describes how the science fiction author L. Ron Hubbard turned his toxic neuroses into the basis for an utterly bogus belief system designed to extract money from dupes. This is the guy who punched his wife for smiling in her sleep. This is the guy Tom Cruise refers to, with reverential affection, as 'LRH'.

If you're looking for an elegantly written book that will transform your understanding of the British national character, try *Weeping Britannia: Portrait of a Nation in Tears* by Thomas Dixon (OUP, £25). Turns out the phenomenon of the stiff upper lip was a lot more fleeting than one might have thought: it arose at the same time as the empire, and declined with it too.

## Richard Davenport-Hines

Laurence Scott's *The Four-Dimensional Human: Ways of Being in the Digital World* (Heinemann, £20) is the year's most surprising book. I expected a dour, lumbering tract about the dehumanising influence of new technologies, social media and information overload. Instead, I found a real flirt of a book. It's full of impish gaiety, elegant and lithe in its language, providing intellectual ambushes and startling connections. It examines our evolving notions of publicity, privacy, time-wasting, frivolity, friendship, allegiances, denial, escapism and squalor in the internet age. The teasing, wary optimism is bewitching as well as informative.

The little volumes of the 'Penguin Monarchs' series (£10.99 each) will be a matchless collection when completed. Already they provide a first-rate history of England, its monarchy and the effects of power on character. I've relished Anne Curry on Henry V, Stephen Alford on Edward VI, David Womersley on James II and Roger Knight's William IV — but really there is not a dud among them.

## Ferdinand Mount

For me this has been the year of Meg Wolitzer. She is like Philip Roth with added warmth, better jokes and more sex. All her novels are delicious — *The Wife*, *The Position*, *The Ten-Year Nap* and, most recently, *The Interestings* (Vintage, £8.99), which is about an artistic summer camp for privileged teenagers from New York. How odd it is that the United States, supposedly the ultimate classless society, should have produced so many masterpieces about upper-class educational institutions: *The Group*, *The Catcher in the Rye*, Donna Tartt's *The Secret History*. *The Interestings* holds its head up in this company and has more of a tragic edge than any of them.

## Wynn Wheldon

A long time ago the novelist Marghanita Laski opined that the BBC had been the greatest single influence for good upon the life of the nation since the decline of the churches. A little later my father, Huw Wheldon, called it 'one of the great institutions of the western world'. Charlotte Higgins regards the corporation as 'the most powerful British institution of them all'. Her history of the BBC, *This New Noise* (Guardian/Faber, £12.99) is intellectually coherent and a pleasure to read. It gives proper credit to the 'pioneer of TV current affairs', Grace Wyndham Goldie.

Bernard Cornwell's *Waterloo* (Collins, £8.99) is excellent, chiefly in its willingness to tell the story from the point of view of the battle's combatants, while never allowing the narrative — and what a story it is — to flag.

I have at last caught up with Donna Tartt's novel *The Secret History* (Penguin, £8.99), which I approached in piety but finished consumed.

## Ian Thomson

*Neurotribes* (Allen & Unwin, £16.99), a superb amalgam of social history and contemporary reportage by the San Francisco author Steve Silberman, looks at the role of autism in shaping human history and the tech bubble of Silicon Valley. In *Nightwalking: A Nocturnal History of London* (Verso, £20), Matthew Beaumont chronicles night-time in the capital city from William the Conqueror's day to the 19th century. Rarely has a book about darkness been so illuminating.

Michael Jacobs, who died in January 2014, was a polymath Hispanist, art historian and good-time gourmet. I met him six or seven times only but I liked him so much that I coveted him as a friend. His book on Diego Velazquez's 1656 mirror-game of truth and illusion, 'Las Meninas', *Everything is Happening: Journey into a Painting* (Granta, £15.99), is sublime.



Velazquez's 'Las Meninas', the subject of Michael Jacobs's *Everything is Happening*

The most overrated book of the year might well be Salman Rushdie's *Two Years Eight Months & Twenty-Eight Nights* (Cape, £18.99), a work of sub-Tolkien jibber-jabber and negligible import.

## Jan Morris

My favourite book of the year was *The Hotel Years*, a collection of wanderings by the incomparable Joseph Roth (Granta, £16.99). I was oddly touched by *Everything is Happening: Journey into a Painting*, the swan-song of Michael Jacobs con-

cerning the Velazquez masterpiece 'Las Meninas'. And the grand and peculiar *Landmarks* seemed to me a welcome change of direction by the uniquely gifted Robert Macfarlane (Hamish Hamilton, £20).

## Philip Ziegler

Isaiah Berlin's *Affirming: Letters 1975–1997* (Chatto & Windus, £40). This fourth and final volume of Berlin's letters, admirably edited by Henry Hardy and Mark Pottle, brings vividly back to life one of the most wise, witty and generous of men. Alistair Horne's *Hubris* (Weidenfeld, £25) provides a penetrating study of six critically important battles of the second world war, each one illustrating how the sin of pride brings disaster on those who indulge in it. It is difficult to know whether to admire more the author's mastery of his subject or his literary skills.

## Roger Lewis

I wish I could pull off the Anthony Burgess stunt and recommend books of my own — *Erotic Vagrancy*, about Burton and Taylor, and *Growing Up With Comedians*, about, well, comedians. Both are doing well on Amazon and have garnered wonderful reviews. They are clearly my most successful and esteemed achievements. Unfortunately, neither title actually exists as such and no words have been written. The publishers jumped the gun with their announcements — though in our 'virtual' world perhaps this no longer matters.

A book I do have physically in my hands, which I enjoyed immensely, is David Hare's *The Blue Touch Paper* (Faber, £20), which is as phosphorescent as a Larkin poem. It is easy enough to see how the puritanical repressions and genteelisms of post-war Bexhill-on-Sea fomented Hare's anger and gave him impetus as a playwright — but what about his mother? I have read no more powerful a scene than the one where Nancy Hare, after a lifetime of provincial middle-class 'recessiveness and apprehension', waits until her deathbed before she can finally snap: 'Well then damn you. Damn you to hell!'

## Paul Johnson

This has been a good year for biographies, especially of all-rounders. Hugh Purcell did a lot of digging to uncover the nine lives of that secretive man John Freeman. *A Very Private Celebrity* (Robson Press Biteback, £25) lists them as follows: pre-war advertising executive, wartime officer (Monty called him 'the best brigade major in the Eighth Army'), postwar MP, Labour minister, Bevanite rebel, TV interviewer, top-line diplomat and ambassador in Washington, DC, media mogul and star academic at a US uni-

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versity — all first-class of their kind — and fascinating to read about.

Richard Davenport-Hines is equally vivid in *Universal Man: The Seven Lives of John Maynard Keynes* (Collins, £18.99). They were altruist, boy prodigy, Treasury official, public man, lover (both homosexual and heterosexual), art collector and economic envoy. A rich story, brilliantly told.

This hardly leaves room for the first volume of Niall Ferguson's gigantic biography *Kissinger, 1923–1968: The Idealist* (Allen Lane, £35), another universal man. What a lot of good reading I had in 2015!

## Melanie McDonagh

No question about the book of the year: it's Michel Houellebecq's *Submission* (Heinemann, £18.99) in Lorin Stein's fluent translation. It's France, 2022, when a moderate Muslim Brotherhood government takes charge. While the narrator submits to the new low-key Islamic regime, the liberal left collapses for want of coherence before an ideology intent on winning the battle of ideas through demography. 'To them it's simple — whichever segment of the population has the highest birthrate and does the best job of transmitting its values, wins.' Following its publication, the *Guardian* asked brightly: 'Does Houellebecq really hate women and Muslims, or is he just a twisted provocateur?' But the book is more nuanced and more troubling than that. The narrator doesn't register women who aren't young and shaggable — tell me that's not how men see women — and in this story, it's libidinous intellectuals who succumb to the new order because it suits them. Plausible? Sort of. Worrying? Yep. Important? Very.

## Mark Amory

Since retiring from coping with new books I have found it a pleasure not to have to glance at any of them. One, however, Anne Tyler's 20th novel *A Spool of Blue Thread* (Vintage, £7.99), was pure pleasure. A quiet family drama over four generations, set in Baltimore as usual, it was never obvious which way it was going, but patterns emerged in the end.

My interest in India is matched only by my ignorance, so almost everything in Ferdinand Mount's *Tears of the Rajas* (Simon & Schuster, £25) came as a surprise to me. Through the careers of various enterprising relations, he tells the story of the British in the years leading up to the mutiny — or first war of independence as I now know it should be called. We cannot be said to emerge with great credit, but it is maddening how often someone had the right idea but not the power to enforce it. Gripping.

I reread *The Vale of Laughter* (originally published in 1967) by a forgotten American comic novelist called Peter de Vries because

I remembered the opening fondly: 'Call me, Ishmael. Feel absolutely free to. Call me any hour of the day or night at the office or at home.' He must remain forgotten.

## A.N. Wilson

No book this year has provided me with such interest and visual delight as Gavin Stamp's superb *Gothic for the Steam Age: An Illustrated Biography of George Gilbert Scott* (Aurum Press, £30). The Midland Hotel St Pancras, the Martyr's Memorial in Oxford, the Albert Memorial in Kensington, the Hereford Choir Screen, Holy Trinity Rugby, where I often worshipped (eheu, now demolished), St Mary's Cathedral, Edinburgh — one of the finest cathedrals in the world. Stamp is the finest architectural historian of the Victorian era and his evocation of Scott — architect and human being — is a masterpiece, accompanied by superb illustrations. It is an intensely sad book, for so many of the towns which Scott beautified have been wrecked. Imagine yourself standing in Atkinson Grimshaw's depiction of damp twilight in 'Park Row, Leeds,' 1882, full of marvellous buildings (Scott's red-brick Beckett's Bank the most conspicuous), every one of which, as Stamp says poignantly, was demolished in the 1960s.



Atkinson Grimshaw's 'Park Row, Leeds', as it looked in 1882

## Bevis Hillier

Though artfully plotted and well written, some of Rachel Billington's early novels, starting with *All Things Nice* in 1969, had a tinge of Mills & Boon. Reviewing one of them, Auberon Waugh wrote: 'The hero is described as "smooth and pink". Good: I hate green, prickly heroes.'

By the time she wrote *A Woman's Age* (1979) — a novel covering roughly the same lifespan as that of her mother, Eliza-

beth Longford — Billington had matured into about the same standing as Elizabeth Jane Howard. Though Howard's Cazalet chronicles are pleasurable to read and laced with intellect and wit, she is not in the same class of acclaimed 'literary novelist' as, say, Colette or Iris Murdoch.

With Billington's new novel, *Glory* (Orion, £19.99), she has broken through an invisible barrier into a distinctly higher echelon. Timed for publication on the centenary of Gallipoli — the first world war disaster in which her grandfather, Brigadier-General the 5th Earl of Longford, was killed — her book leaves behind the cosiness of upper-class dinner parties to traffic in carnage; though, like Shakespeare at his goriest, Billington relieves the grand sweep of horrors with oases of humour.

*Glory* is as near to a British *War and Peace* as any contemporary novelist is likely to come. Winston Churchill gets a walk-on part — as a villain.

## Mark Cocker

*The Invention of Nature: The Adventures of Alexander von Humboldt, the Lost Hero of Science* by Andrea Wulf (John Murray, £25). Darwin pronounced him the greatest scientific traveller who ever lived, but the brilliant German Alexander von Humboldt (1769–1859) left no groundbreaking theory or world-changing book. Wulf sets out to restore his diminished reputation, and has given us the most complete portrait of one of the world's most complete naturalists.

Derek Ratcliffe occupied a smaller stage but was no less committed to a panoramic understanding of British nature. Writer, scientist, explorer, mountaineer, photographer and unremitting champion of the wild, Ratcliffe had a breadth and talent that is richly celebrated in *Nature's Conscience: The Life and Legacy of Derek Ratcliffe*, edited by Des Thomson, Hilary Birks and John Birks (Langford Press, £23).

Oliver Morton's *Eating the Sun* will test to the very limits any layperson's grasp of chemistry and physics, but this wonderfully lyrical, all-embracing pursuit of life on Earth (published in 2009 by Fourth Estate) is an intellectual adventure of the highest quality and a stake through the heart of any climate-change-denying pseudoscience.

## Julie Burchill

Now that I've given up drugs, I find myself addicted to psychological thrillers written by women, featuring no gore and a great deal of malice a forethought. My favourites this year were (in order of preference) *Disclaimer* by Renée Knight (Doubleday, £12.99), *You* by Caroline Kepnes (Simon & Schuster, £7.99) and *I Let You Go* by Clare Mackintosh (Sphere, £7.99). And Nick

Cohen's brilliant *What's Left: How the Left Lost its Way* (Harper Perennial, £9.99) was reissued just in time to provide an explanation for the Labour party's current ecstatic self-immolation. I have bought and given away a dozen copies of this book, and I plan to buy and give away a dozen more.

### Jonathan Sumption

Richard Bourke's *Empire and Revolution: The Political Life of Edmund Burke* (Princeton, £30.95) is a monument of exact scholarship and careful reflection, by a long way the best book that we have on this profound and much misunderstood politician and philosopher.

For those who want more thunder than even Burke can offer, Rory Muir's *Wellington: Waterloo and the Fortunes of Peace, 1814–1852* (Yale, £30) completes the author's outstanding two-volume biography. Finally, Penguin Classics confirms its reputation for range and eclecticism with *Magna Carta*, with a superb commentary by David Carpenter (£10.99); and *Wellington's Military Dispatches*, edited by Charles Esdaile, which is full of the great man's laconic put-downs and provides an excellent companion volume to Muir's biography (£9.99).

### Mark Mason

*Royalty Inc.* by Stephen Bates (Aurum Press, £20) is a superb account of how 'the Firm' (Windsors rather than Krays) became 'Britain's best-known brand'. Bates is a veteran royal journalist, though much of his career was on the *Guardian*, which wouldn't let him use that title. He reveals that the palace's own term for their game-plan is the 'Marmite jar strategy': pretend you're a timeless and static part of the national furniture, while subtly and constantly changing to remain relevant.

Simon Hughes's *Who Wants to be a Batsman?* (Simon & Schuster, £18.99) brilliantly analyses this fragile creature. Nasser Hussain's girlfriend accidentally records *Neighbours* over his coaching tape, Alastair Cook has to have the volume of his car stereo on an even number, while Ricky Ponting's advice on knowing your limitations applies to us all, cricketers or not: 'Swim between the flags.'

### Peter Parker

Tessa Hadley's subtle and beautifully written *The Past* (Cape, £16.99) brilliantly evokes the tensions between a clutch of middle-aged siblings spending one last holiday in their old family home. In a variety of ways of which the characters are not always aware, the past impinges upon the present with both funny and horrifying results. This was my novel of the year, but I also enjoyed and admired Panos Karnezis's *The Fugitives*

(Cape, £12.99), an elegantly spare tale of a troubled priest's involvement in the fight for land between Indians and squatters in a South American rainforest.

Treat of the year was Raymond Cauchetier's *New Wave* (ACC Editions, £40). The name may be unfamiliar, but the images are world-famous: Jean Seberg and Jean-Paul Belmondo on the poster for *À Bout de Souffle*, a moustachioed and flat-capped Jeanne Moreau in *Jules et Jim*, Jean-Pierre Léaud as three incarnations of Antoine Doinel. Cauchetier's on-set photographs capture perfectly that exhilarating moment when *la nouvelle vague* broke upon the shores of world cinema.



Dorothée Blanck in Jacques Demy's *Lola*, 1960  
(From Raymond Cauchetier's *New Wave*)

### A.S. Byatt

This year I have read two very original and gripping British novels: *Lurid and Cute* by Adam Thirlwell (Cape, £16.99) and *Satin Island* by Tom McCarthy (Cape, £16.99). The first is a phantasmagoric tale of a modern world full of sex and violence, which is both funny and shocking. The second is an image of another part of the modern world — the daily dominance of computers and their language and imagery — which takes place in anonymous worlds like airport waiting spaces and grey offices.

I have admired both these writers since I started reading them; each new book is different from its predecessor, with new storytelling and language which are an intrinsic part of their worlds. I can't imagine what Thirlwell and McCarthy will do next, but I look forward to it. British fiction is alive and full of energy.

### John Preston

Dominic Sandbrook's *The Great British Dream Factory* (Allen Lane, £25) is very long, but I read it in less than two days, my attention never flagging. Sandbrook's main contention is that as Britain declined as an imperial power, it reinvented itself as a purveyor of popular culture to the world. Embracing everything from Black Sabbath's guitarist, Tony Iommi, losing his fingers in a sheet metal press to the 2012 Olympic opening ceremony, it's dramatic, perceptive and often extremely funny.

Jonathan Bate's *Ted Hughes: The Unauthorised Life* (William Collins, £30) is very long too — and somehow manages to be both prim and prurient. But there's also plenty of fascinating stuff here. It says a lot about Hughes's baleful allure that — on separate occasions — he was mistaken for Engelbert Humperdinck and the Yorkshire Ripper.

### Mary Beard

I am unashamedly sticking to my own home territory. Cambridge has become something of a literary hotspot. Last year it was Ali Smith (*How to be Both*) and Helen Macdonald (*H is for Hawk*). This year we have Clive James's wonderful (and let's hope not last) collection of poetry, *Sentenced to Life* (Picador, £14.99), including the marvellous 'Japanese Maple', which unusually for a poem went viral after it first appeared in the *New Yorker*.

And then there is Ruth Scurr's extraordinary literary reconstruction of the diary of John Aubrey: *My Own Life* (Chatto, £25), which has already been marked down as a 'Desert Island book'.

### Ruth Scurr

2015 has been a terrific year for women writers. I have especially enjoyed Mary Beard's sceptical and subversive history of Rome, *SPQR* (Profile, £25); Alexandra Harris's literary history of the English weather, *Weatherland: Writers and Artists Under English Skies* (Thames & Hudson, £24.95); and Antonia Fraser's witty memoir of growing up, *My History* (Weidenfeld, £9.99).

I loved Anne Enright's darkly glinting novel of family life, *The Green Road* (Cape, £16.99), but my female novelist of the year is Elena Ferrante. I found Ann Goldstein's translations of the Neopolitan novels — *My Brilliant Friend*, *The Story of a New Name*, *Those Who Leave and Those Who Stay*, and *The Story of the Lost Child* (published by Europa Editions) — completely engrossing: like a return to childhood reading.

*More Books of the Year* next week.

# Logrolling on the South Downs

## Alexander Masters

The advantage of reviewing books by a friend is that you can invite him out for a walk across the South Downs and menace him with blunt questions. Books pages editors call this sort of thing 'backscratching' and 'logrolling', as if, instead of engaging in proper criticism, you and your mate had spent the time on a sauna holiday in Sweden. But cronyism lets you discover new things about writing, literature and yourself that are inaccessible to the ordinary critic.

Cornelius Medvei, whose father lives in Sussex, a few fields away from me, has published three novels. They are fables that are witty, wry and thin (in terms of pages) and nobody except Susan Hill and I reads them. The latest one, *The Making of Mr Bolsover*, is about a local politician who becomes a prophet and ends up living in a wood, cooking rats. On the back cover is a review of Medvei's first novel, *Mr Thundermug*. 'Delightful, unforgettable and splendidly peculiar.' That review is by me. 'A book of genius,' says another review — that's by Susan Hill.

Cornelius writes 'like nothing else I have ever read', says Susan. I've met her only once, at a fundraising event for the Emmaus homeless community in Oxford. We instantly forgot about the homeless and talked about Cornelius. About how odd he is; how lanky; how his writing makes you feel he's been teleported from the 1920s, part-Kafka, part-John Collier; how at unlikely parties you turn round and find him standing six inches behind you, quiet and steady as a post; and how he should be in every bookcase.

I've had *Mr Bolsover* on my desk for the past six months. I tore it open the instant it arrived, finished it in two hours, then shoved the book aside in despair. It is brilliant; and, again, it won't sell.

'What is wrong with you?' I demanded as we began our walk up onto the Downs. It was a drizzly day. 'Why can't you write a straightforward book that will give you a decent income?'

'I don't know,' groaned Cornelius, bending himself into the wind. 'I thought this one would do it. It is very funny, it has a strong plot.'

'And it is full of obscure 19th-century references to political theory. Why don't you write about 21st-century issues?'

'*Mr Thundermug* was about alienation,' he protested.

'The hero was a monkey who spends his time gazing at the sky and having

philosophical thoughts while his wife eats the bugs out of his fur.'

'Bookshops often put it in the children's section,' admitted Cornelius. 'They don't know what to make of it.'

'Couldn't you include a murder or a love interest — something that the reader can get his teeth into?'

'My second book, *Caroline*, was a romantic novel.'

'About a man who falls in love with a donkey!'

'I often find that one in crime,' agreed Cornelius.

'And then you have adopted this strange detached style for *Mr Bolsover*, a sort of arch remoteness, as though you'd attached your pen to the end of a long stick, like Matisse.'

It was at this point that Cornelius, untangling himself over a stile, went rigid and had his insight into types of authors. 'Each time I write a book I have this oddity that I'm trying to convey. I'm taking the framework set-up for one thing, and trying to make it work for another.'

### My friend Cornelius Medvei should be in every bookcase — and Susan Hill agrees

With *Caroline*, for a quadruped. With *Mr Bolsover* it was political biography. But instead of Gladstone I wanted to see if I could make it work for a Lewes town councillor.'

'Yet you don't try to get inside Mr Bolsover's head, like another novelist would. You don't explain why he changes from a councillor into a rat-eater.'

'Precisely! Political biographies don't. Why did Trotsky become an advocate of permanent revolution? In the biographies there's a wan passage about him being an idealist, or driven by a sense of mission; but otherwise they pass over it. The motivations for change in these books are either not identified or are banal. In Mr Bolsover's case, he was hit over the head by a library book.'

'So you approach your novels as a solution to a puzzle? I do that too. My last book was a biography of an unknown, affectless theoretical mathematician who had forgotten his childhood, didn't know how to tell anecdotes and whose hobby

was going on buses. I wanted to see if one could write an entertaining biography about someone who had nothing to offer the biographical form. It was perverse. I worked on it for five years.'

'There you go,' said Cornelius. 'Did that book sell?'

'Not a sausage. My agent says he's never seen so much red ink on anybody's accounts before.'

'That's our difficulty,' concluded Cornelius.

He paused at a hedge, pushed aside a strand of bramble to reveal a muddy bridleway and stooped into it. 'There are different reasons people write, and we've got ourselves caught in a wrong one. We don't take characters and develop them; we set ourselves writing puzzles and try to solve them. Do you know that story by Somerset Maugham that starts, "I wonder if I can do this?" No? Read it. He is another of us.'

This algebraic attitude to writing also explains why Cornelius's books take so long. 'I can see this scene or that twist, but I don't know the answer overall. I just know the feeling I'm after. I'm always going on at my students about how they should spend more time planning essays before starting writing, but that's never the way I do it. I just jump in, start writing, chasing this feeling that will be an answer to the puzzle, and get bogged down. It leads to endless points of despair.'

'I know the sensation perfectly,' I sighed, kicking a stone and landing my foot in a muddy puddle. 'The book I'm working on now is based on 150 anonymous diaries. It is an attempt to answer the question: "Can you write a biography of a person when you don't know who the person is?"'

'More red ink for your agent,' commiserated Cornelius.

After I left Cornelius, I walked on across the hills, wondering about this point: is being friends with the author actually an asset to reviewing? Cronyism lets you see the author at work, thinking, still involved in the narrative; it keeps the book alive and supple, unlike the dead slab that lands on the desks of friendless reviewers. By combining debate and mutual criticism, the backscratcher exposes both the author and the inquisitor; it is the only impartial form of critique.

Looking up, I saw the sun breaking through the clouds above Eastbourne, and ambled home, satisfied with Cornelius's defence of his book and writing, and gently alarmed by his exposure of my own.

Alexander Masters is the author of *Stuart: A Life Backwards* and *The Genius in My Basement*.

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## The oddest Inkling

Philip Hensher

### Charles Williams: The Third Inkling

by Grevel Lindop  
 OUP, £25, pp. 493,  
 ISBN 9780199284153  
 Spectator Bookshop, £21.25

Charles Williams was a bad writer, but a very interesting one. Most famous bad writers have to settle, like Sidney Sheldon, for the millions and the made-for-TV adaptations and the trophy wife. Williams had a following, and in the 1930s and 1940s some highly respected literary figures declared him to be a genius. But why did Williams appeal so strongly to a particular age — and what, if anything, can he offer us now?

He belonged to that wonderful generation liberated by the 19th-century spread of education. He came from a family with no resources, but a terrible, pathetic yearning for literature. His father, Walter, managed to scrape into print, writing moralising short stories and sentimental poems for the cheapest magazines. Grevel Lindop says that he was published in Dickens's *All the Year Round* and *Household Words*, but I don't see how that could have been possible, because Walter must have been 11 when *Household Words* came to an end. An aunt wrote verses for greetings cards, and one uncle had a scholarly bent, publishing on local history and 'early earthworks'.

Education was at a charity-funded parish school — the smallest of educational opportunities. Against the odds, Williams won a scholarship to St Albans Grammar School and, at the age of 15, a county scholarship to UCL to a pre-degree course. But money in

the end was too short, and Williams had to withdraw from formal education.

For the rest of his life, he combined writing with working in the book trade. There is something telling about the particular flavour of Williams's professional life; it was in the dignified but ineffective part of publishing, first in the Methodist Book Room and later at Oxford University Press. A lot of his output there consisted of writing introductions to other people's books or whole short books, commissioned by the Press.

Then as now, OUP was not quite like normal publishing. Lindop's account of the peculiar atmosphere of the place has considerable charm — lolling around, conducting chastely sado-masochistic affairs with female members of staff, writing poisonous novels about your male colleagues who were at the same time writing poisonous novels about you. It had its own money-saving ideas; amusingly, Lindop shares in the outrage in 1936 when W.B. Yeats, having compiled a very large anthology, did not accept that it was his job rather than the publishers' to send a copy to every contributor. (Note to inexperienced future collaborators with OUP: it's their job.) All in all, the curious, half-scholarly, cloistered air of the Press encouraged what perhaps should have been discouraged in the unworldly, painfully dignified Williams: the pretence to rarefied and hermetic wisdom. He might have been better off working at the *Daily Mail*.

Williams was out of fashion from the start. His poetic influence, touchingly, was Coventry Patmore, just when Harold Monro was stripping the archaic and the ornamental away from English poetry. But if his style is dated and his poetic rhythms are those of a tone-deaf man, his subject

*His unregenerated Cockney tones while reciting Milton must have been compellingly unfamiliar in 1940s Oxford*

matter at least was arresting. He signed up to a number of mystical secret organisations involving Rosicrucianism and even alchemy. After the first world war such movements were very popular, when acquaintance with the recently dead was a universal condition. When Williams turned to novels in the late 1920s, their bizarre world found an extraordinarily fervent — if limited — following.

Reading them over the last week, I can understand their appeal — and even wonder whether an age that loves Haruki Murakami might rediscover them. They are pretty bad — cardboard characters, long, abstract ramblings, dialogue like nothing on earth — but sometimes bad writing can reach places that good writing hardly knows

about. The last of them, *All Hallows' Eve*, follows the posthumous adventures of two girls killed by a bomb. At the novel's climax one of them enters into the body of a female dwarf created out of earth by the villain of the piece (a Wandering Jew who has married a Highgate society hostess and enslaved her daughter), in order to conduct a conversation with her own widower, the enslaved daughter (who she was at school with) and others.

Whether Williams in person was as saintly as many claimed is another matter. In private, he was a sexual sadist of rather a schoolmasterly kind, and he surrounded himself with female disciples. Masochists are often cheerful, well-balanced people; sadists are generally unhappy egotists, filled with shame. The evidence for Williams's saintliness I find unconvincing. One observer was astonished, and moved, to see that Williams once 'helped to carry a baby in a pushcart up the steps of a Tube station — an entirely unknown baby'. Perhaps manners have changed, but I think anyone now with a moment to spare would help a stranger in this way, and not expect friends to cite it as an example of their virtue. Rather more to the point is how Williams treated his long-suffering wife, Michal, conducting affairs when she thought he was off on his Rosicrucian evenings. His son, Michael, was a psychological disaster area.

Williams ended up in an environment that exactly suited him and which supplies the subtitle for this biography. In Oxford, he was taken up by C.S. Lewis and J.R.R. Tolkien and admitted to their Inklings group. Their association strangely propelled him into a sort of fashion, and he became an immensely popular, oracular lecturer on poetry — his unregenerated Cockney tones when reciting Milton must have been compellingly unfamiliar in 1940s Oxford. His death was sudden, tragic, and coming as it did in the last days of the war, brought into focus all sorts of complex feelings about loss and the purpose of existence.

This solid and scholarly biography explores the byways of literary history with much verve and energy. I guess that Lindop has contemplated this for many years. He doesn't quite make the case for his hero as a writer; but as a phenomenon who attracted the likes of Eliot and Tolkien, Williams is shown in all his weird and slightly pathetic glory.

He is, of course, the property of a tiny literary sect, who regard him as the greatest writer who ever lived, and they will be kept busy arguing about this book for years to come. For the rest of us, Lindop has provided a fascinating account of a literary life of a very particular sort. His subject was of the generation that tried — not always successfully — to burn with a hard, gemlike flame.

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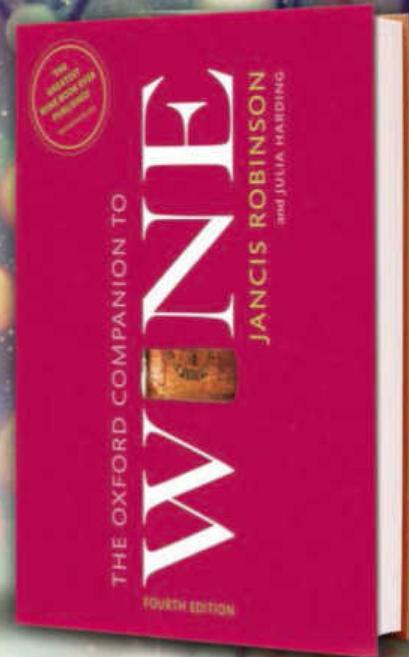
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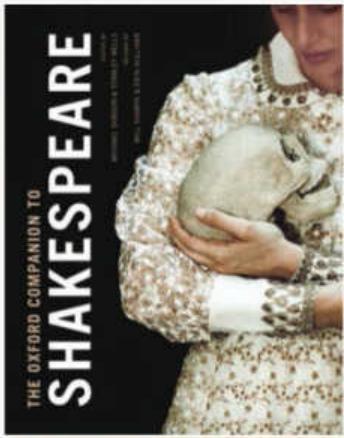
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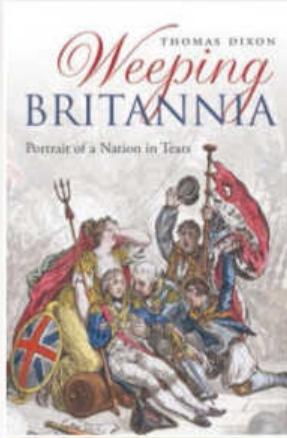
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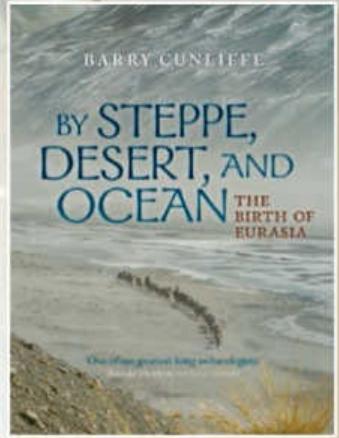
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## High priestess of punk

### Helen R. Brown

#### Patti Smith Collected Lyrics, 1970–2015

Bloomsbury, £20 pp. 320,  
ISBN 9781408863008  
Spectator Bookshop, £17

#### M Train

by Patti Smith  
Bloomsbury, £18.99, pp. 272,  
ISBN 9781408867686  
Spectator Bookshop, £16.14

‘Jesus died for somebody’s sins/ but not mine’: the opening lines of Patti Smith’s 1975 debut album, *Horses*, find a young woman marking her territory with fierce conviction. Raised as a Jehovah’s Witness, she was (or was treated as) an invalid for much of her New Jersey childhood. The restrictions were physical and spiritual. But in her twenties the androgynous daughter of blue-collar workers used her punk poetry to reclaim the freedoms North American culture had stolen from her. And while she relieved Jesus of responsibility for her sins, she certainly didn’t count her compulsion to write and lust and holler among them.

Her *Collected Lyrics*, updated by Bloomsbury this month, mark her transition from the ‘moral schoolgirl hard-working asshole’ who yearned to ‘smell the way boys smell’ to incandescent stage poet, driving herself to ‘go Rimbaud!’ with the rawest kind of rock’n’roll. Later lyrics give outraged human voice to those who are still oppressed. 2004’s ‘Radio Baghdad’ finds her marvelling at the glories of ancient Mesopotamia before turning on the modern warmongers with a weary one-two: ‘We invented the zero/ Now we mean nothing to you.’

But the printed page is always a zoo for lyrics: where mighty roars lie down and lose their spirit. You feel guilty for looking at them this way. On stage, Smith balances the overblown romance of her versifying with attitude. When she delivers those floppy-sleeved ‘bequeath’s and ‘implore thee’s (which persist right into her latest songs) against a squall of Fender feedback, she’s owning poetry’s right to be heard, to be cool, to be out. But her ideas look silly sent back home to the page.

Better to read the words she intends us to read. Her 2010 memoir, *Just Kids*, was a thrilling account of her complex relationship with Robert Mapplethorpe and won the National Book Award. *M Train* is a strangely seductive meditation on the artist as a sexagenarian.

If the early lyrics document Smith reaching out for what was hers, this later book charts a struggle to let go. She loses objects she has charged with great personal power: a favourite coat, a book and a camera. She

loses days to an unknown malaise and the better part of a house to a hurricane. She visits the graves of heroes: there are photos of Sylvia Plath’s headstone in the snow and incense burning above the bones of Ryunosuke Akutagawa. Humming through it all is the loss of her husband, the guitarist Fred Sonic Smith, who died of a heart attack (aged 45) in 1994, leaving her to raise their small children alone.

Although fans felt Smith had ‘disappeared’ when she married Sonic, she remembers a magical period during which the couple

held fast to the concept of the clock with no hands. Tasks were completed, sump pumps manned, sandbags piled, trees planted, shirts ironed, hems stitched, and yet we reserved the right to ignore the hands that kept on turning. Looking back, long after his death, our way of living seems a miracle, one that could only be achieved by the silent synchronisation of the jewels and gears of a common mind.



Patti Smith, Amsterdam, 1976

She still finds herself picking up one of his shirts, calling him home, exhausted by grief. She yearns for her children as they were and whimpers: ‘Don’t go, don’t grow.’

These days her life appears simple and solitary. She writes, paints, travels and takes photographs. Although she still over-romanticises the artistic life, her writing can give a supernatural charge to the daily rituals of coffee-drinking and cat-feeding. Some of her passions are surprising: she’s a member of an obscure society devoted to the German polar explorer and meteorologist Alfred Wegener. Her favourite thing about England is ITV3 and at first you think: if I wanted a rambling retelling of a late 1980s episode of *Inspector Morse* then I’d phone my parents. But Smith manages to make weird fables of *Lewis and Cracker*.

As she said at Denmark’s Louisiana Literature Festival in 2012:

That energy people call punk? I’ll have it my whole life. If I’m raising children, if I’m washing clothes I’m still the girl who can put her foot through an amplifier.

## Fasten your seatbelts

### Benjamin Johncock

#### Sonic Wind: The Story of John Paul Stapp and How a Renegade Doctor Became the Fastest Man on Earth

by Craig Ryan  
Liveright, £17.99, pp. 432,  
ISBN 9780871406774  
Spectator Bookshop, £15.29

There’s a moment in Craig Ryan’s spectacular biography of John Paul Stapp — the maverick American Air Force doctor who, in the 1950s, became the fastest man on earth — where the reader falls inexorably in love with Ryan’s subject. It’s on page 17, when Stapp encounters what his Baptist missionary father had taught his sons to prepare for: ‘The epiphany that would illuminate the nature of their calling.’

Christmas is three days gone, and Stapp’s two-year-old cousin, momentarily alone in front of the fireplace, throws part of the Sunday newspaper over the grate. It ignites, catching the boy’s cotton pyjamas, setting them ablaze. Someone plunges the child into a tub of icy water outside, but the burns are horrific. The 18-year-old John Paul (named after his father’s favourite two apostles) watches as the local doctor treats the boy with a mixture of lime and linseed oil, and John Paul remains awake for the better part of 60 hours at his cousin’s side, doing what he can, until, inevitably, the boy dies. The adolescent Stapp rages against the ineffective ‘dolt’ of a doctor, who, in Stapp’s opinion, should have immediately transported the boy to hospital in nearby Austin. Rendered with the unsentimental clarity of Ryan’s prose, the event is heartbreaking.

The incident galvanises the young Stapp into his cause: the protection of the human body. By the time of his own death, in 1999, he was perhaps ‘indirectly responsible for saving more lives than anyone in history’.

In 1944, during his second year of medical school, Stapp was drafted into the United States Medical Corps. Enamoured by aviation, he applied to the School of Aviation Medicine and became a flight surgeon. He accepted a project at Muroc Air Base, a remote and desolate place up in the high elevations of the bone-dry Mojave desert, which was about to become the touchline of the future. Stapp had recently encountered pilot ejection systems and was convinced that men, properly restrained and protected

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in their planes, could walk away from violent crashes. For this, his 'band of pirates' would employ a piece of Muroc equipment that would make him famous: the rocket sled test vehicle — a seat that would accelerate along a 2,000-foot track at incredible speed and stop on a dime, thus simulating the effects of ejection from a speeding aircraft.

Across the base were the men he sought to save: test pilots like Chuck Yeager, who was preparing to fly faster than the speed of sound in the Bell X-1 research rocket plane. Stapp's decision to ride the rocket sled himself as a human volunteer was one that caused him to have a tempestuous relationship with his air force superiors for the duration of his military life. On the next generation rocket sled, 'Sonic Wind', Stapp pushed himself to the brink of human endurance at speeds of over 600 mph and forces in excess of 46 gs (literally faster than a speeding bullet).

It was the beginning of an extraordinary career in which Stapp pioneered man's capacity for space flight. His work on the high-altitude balloon research of Project Manhigh was the first space programme, predating the formation of Nasa by three years. Stapp's work provided a bedrock for the start of the space race and his influence and consultation stretched from the first astronaut selection of Project Mercury through Apollo and on into the Shuttle era, also introducing the concept of what would become the International Space Station.

John Paul Stapp was the grandfather of manned space flight. Stapp's greatest legacy, however, was a 15-year-long battle with car manufacturers and politicians to get the seatbelt into America cars, which were claiming 50,000 American lives every year (and three million injuries). By applying his air force research to the auto industry, this number was drastically reduced and countless lives — including those of his brother's children — were saved.

*Sonic Wind* (terrible title aside) is a tremendous feat of storytelling that transcends its biographic genre, with the character of Stapp propelling the narrative — he was a playful, offbeat, complex man; moral, kind, charming, highly resourceful, self-sufficient and unorthodox; a hustler, a rebel with a cause. Dressed, as he always was, in full regulation uniform, including necktie, dress shoes and hat, he possessed a priest-like fervour, born out of his parents' missionary work in Brazil, and a soothing Texan cadence.

This book is, at heart, a family drama writ large; heartbreak, life-affirming, full of unrequited love, selfless love, illicit love, adopted love, family secrets, near-death experiences and peppered with glorious detail. Ryan achieves an emotional resonance rare in historical biography: this is a story for the masses and the movies, and deserves to be a 'breakaway phenomenon'.



Franz Marangolo's advertisement, 1950  
(From *The Life Negroni*)

## Two at the very most...

### Stephen Bayley

#### **The Life Negroni**

by Leigh and Nargess Banks  
Spinach Publishing, £20, pp. 300,  
ISBN 9780993334900  
Spectator Bookshop, £17

#### **The Spirits: A Guide to Modern Cocktailing**

by Richard Godwin  
Square Peg, £16.99, pp. 320,  
ISBN 9780224101189  
Spectator Bookshop, £14.44

#### **Rebellious Spirits: The Illicit History of Booze in Britain**

by Ruth Ball  
Elliott & Thompson, £14.99, pp. 246,  
ISBN 9781783961795  
Spectator Bookshop, £12.74

The first draft of the famous story was called 'A Martini as Big as the Ritz'. That's not true, but F. Scott Fitzgerald was certainly at work in the First Cocktail Age. The Algonquin circle also floated into literary history on a choppy ocean of toxically high-ABV mixed drinks. The quotes and jokes are legend: Robert Benchley says to Ginger Rogers in a 1942 *Billy Wilder* film 'Why don't you get out of that wet coat and into a dry martini?' (The line is also attributed to Mae West.) And ours is the Second Cocktail Age. While we wait for its literary heroes, three appreciative

books are here to be enjoyed in moderation.

My generation prefers wine. Sometimes I feel we actually discovered Chardonnay, but a generation younger has rediscovered the cocktail. There are several significant subtleties here. Running a bar has become as cool as being in a band once was: when someone writes the history of the South London Renaissance, the opening of Frank's Cafe and Campari Bar in a Peckham multi-storey car park in 2009 will be the first chapter. And there has been a huge and happy revival in craft gin, partly as an abreaction to faceless multinational drinks conglomerates, partly as a response to the gastronomic imperative of locality.

But the indulgent, soothing and glamorous cocktail is perhaps a corrective to dismaying contemporary anxieties about a fretful and fraying world. As Richard Godwin says in *The Spirits*, his good-natured manifesto about domestic mixology: 'Of all the skills you might acquire in life, learning how to make strong effective cocktails is the least likely to be a waste of your time.' And, helpfully, you can equip a basic bar with six bottles for about £80 and all the rest is shaking and stirring and sipping. At least until your friends have drunk you dry and you have to restock. *The Spirits* is much more than mere drinks recipes: it is thoughtful, well-researched, witty, well-written and even inspirational.

People will argue about the best cocktail, but few today would defend the Flaming Lamborghini, a millennial period piece which comprises a nauseating come-together of Kahlua, Sambuca, Blue Curacao and Bailey's Irish Cream. You set fire to it. Instead, the ultimate cocktail is surely the Negroni, a lethally delicious mixture of equal parts gin, red vermouth and Campari created by a ricketty Florentine count a century ago. Leigh and Nargess Banks are a husband and wife team who are on a world-travelling mission to understand and enlarge Negroni culture. A well-made Negroni, they say, is 'a metaphor for a refined and glamorous life'. He is a photographer and she a writer of Iranian extraction; which is nice since a rather older Persian called Muhammad ibn Zakariya al-Razi perfected distillation in the ninth century.

*The Life Negroni* is a gorgeous book offering voyeuristic insights into a way of life which may never have existed anywhere other than the imagination, but one that is no less intoxicating for that. You are taken to the lovely Camparino Bar at the Duomo end of Milan's Galleria, then to the neighbouring Terrazza Martini, the rooftop space the drinks company opened in 1958 which was, two years later, used to premiere Fellini's *La Dolce Vita*. The Bankses explain the gustatory complexities of the Negroni, which has about 70 separate

botanical elements including the mysterious sounding Cnicus and dittany of Crete as well as the more earthy turmeric. The pictures in *The Life Negroni* are mesmerising and the range of reference pleasing. As a publication, I was reminded of Luc Sante's epic *No Smoking* of 2004, a masterpiece of book design. It is an album, a love letter, a guide, a memoir and a rich source of graphic delight. Only hedonists would enjoy such a thing. If this seems transgressive in Corbytrannia, so much the better.

Ruth Ball's *Rebellious Spirits* is a more old-fashioned book than Godwin or Banks, evoking, with its tales of gin being piped in alleyways, a mood of nostalgic Blitz-era gentility rather like Maurice Healy's *Stay Me With Flagons* of 1940. It is less well-designed than *The Spirits* or *The Life Negroni* and has a less modern feel, but for tales of *Moonfleet*-style japes and recipes of ancient, disabling drinks (five gallons of milk punch, for example) I do not see that it has any competitors.

I wrote this review the day the *Telegraph* carried a headline saying the middle-aged should immediately stop drinking to avoid dementia. Then I thought of Count Negroni and his 20-a-day cocktail habit. If you are undecided, read these books to determine where you stand in the imminent hell of the temperance debate.

## Bleak mischief

### Ruth Scurr

#### Number 11

by Jonathan Coe

Viking, £16.99, pp. 368,

ISBN 9780670923793

Spectator Bookshop, £14.44

When Rachel, one of the unreliable narrators of *Number 11*, wants to 'go back to the very beginning', she starts with the death of Dr David Kelly, the former United Nations weapons inspector, discovered dead in woodland on Harrowdown Hill in Oxfordshire on 18 July 2003, shortly after casting doubt on the government dossier that claimed Saddam Hussein possessed weapons of mass destruction.

Rachel was ten at the time, staying with her grandparents and school friend Alison in the nearby village of Beverley. For the next ten years — during which she gets into Oxford from a state school, graduates with a 2:1 in English, and becomes a private tutor for the offspring of the superrich — Rachel thinks about Kelly's death often. Her grandparents made it clear 'that this was not an ordinary death, that it would have consequences, send ripples of unease and mistrust throughout the country. That Britain would

be a different place from now on: unquiet, haunted.'

*Number 11* is a bitter satire on unquiet Britain: a country where food banks have become common, libraries are becoming extinct, sadistic reality TV shows dominate the media and the craze for basement conversions is literally undermining London. The novel has five interlinked sections through which spiders, the number 11, and some of the characters from Coe's earlier satire of Britain in the 1980s, *What a Carve Up!* (1994), recur.

Academe comes off badly. Rachel's tutor at Oxford, Laura Harvey, leaves to become Professor of Contemporary Thought at UCL, where she is a member of the Institute for Quality Valuation, attempting 'to quantify things that have traditionally been thought of as unquantifiable. Feelings, in other words.' Her algorithms allow her to calculate that the discovery of 25 skeletons from the 14th century during the digging for Crossrail, 'probably adds 1.2 million pounds to the value of London as a whole'. Laura knows she has 'done a deal with the devil' and is 'dealing with people who have no notion at all that something is important unless you can put a price on it'.

Culture comes off badly too. The steering committee of the Winshaw Prize wants it to

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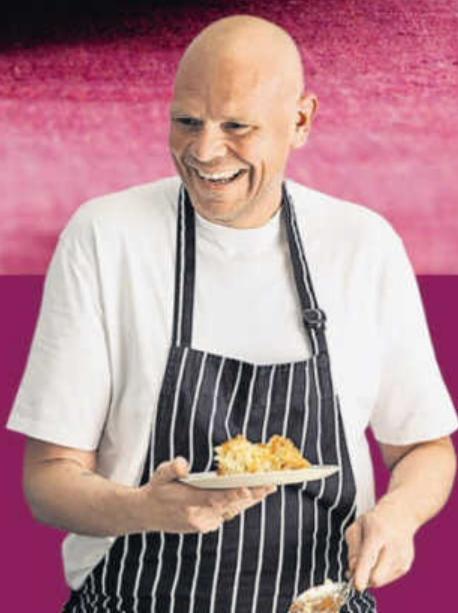
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be the 'ne plus ultra of cultural accolades', open to paintings, sculptures, videos, installations, novels, films, poems, ballets, operas, pop songs and advertising campaigns. Irritated by the column inches still devoted to other prizes, Winshaw's steering committee decides to reboot it as 'an über prize, for the best prize' and there is no need to announce the criteria for judgment, 'since the fundamental meaninglessness of the comparison would be the whole point'. In 2013, the *Literary Review* Bad Sex Award wins the Winshaw Prize. 'Being embarrassed about sex is one of the few things we're still world leaders at, these days,' comments the veteran newspaper editor Sir Peter Eaves.

Smouldering behind the raucous and ridiculous fun is Coe's political anger and erudition. He quotes William Cowper's 'The Task' (1785): 'Yet what can satire, either grave or gay?... What vice has it subdued? What heart reclaimed/ By rigour? Or whom laughed into reform? Alas! Leviathan is not so tamed.' *Number 11* is not a simple sequel to *What a Carve Up!* It deepens and affirms Coe's reputation as the best English satirical novelist of our times.

## Discord in high places

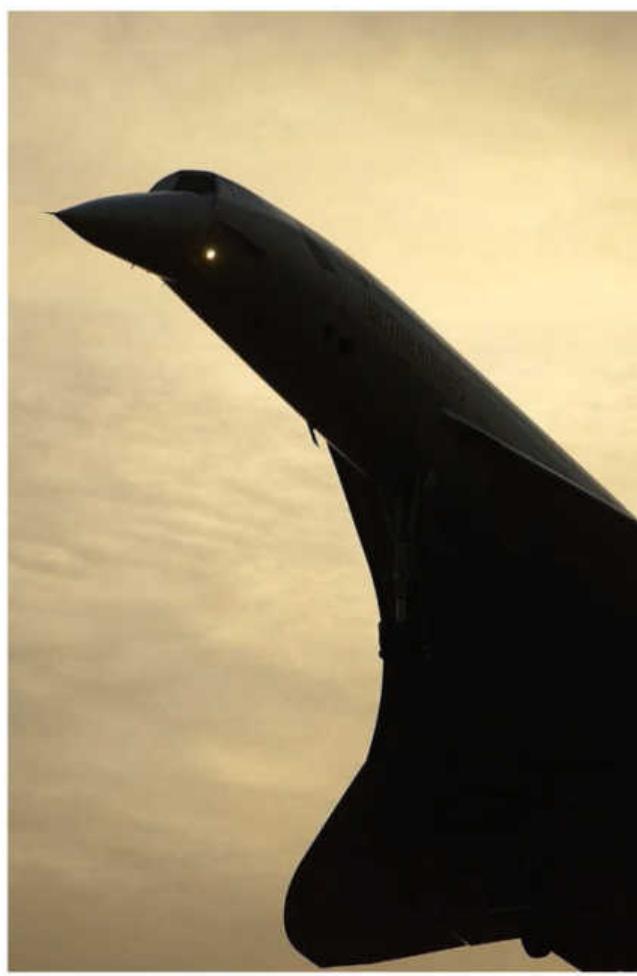
Patrick Skene Catling

### Concorde: The Rise and Fall of the Supersonic Airliner

by Jonathan Glancey  
Atlantic, £20, pp. 320,  
ISBN 9781782391074  
Spectator Bookshop, £17

The Concorde experience, a fleeting indulgence in luxurious grandiosity, began each day with circumvention of the hugger-mugger of the hoi polloi at Heathrow. In the tranquillity of the exclusive Concorde departure lounge, insulated against the vulgar cacophony of the rest of the terminal building, elite passengers, only 100 at a time, while awaiting the call to the aircraft, were able to sip gratis buck's fizz and make gratis unlimited international telephone calls.

On my three Concorde trips, one from London to New York and two to Washington, I was impressed by the rich variety and subliminal sameness of my travelling companions, the modish accoutrements of haute couture and the blasé cool of genuine or simulated cosmopolitanism. There was a fragrance of affluence and celebrity, hints of high ranks in diplomacy, industry and commerce and entertainment, a vision of red carpets and substantial tax deductions. When we entered the intimate confinement of the narrow, tubular fuselage, I noticed that the legroom between the seats was a good deal more extensive than what I was accustomed to. Aboard Concorde one could confidently expect beguiling ego-massage.



MARK WAGNER/AVIATION IMAGES.COM

indicating his magical push-button. 'At twice the speed of sound, you couldn't half get lost.'

Jonathan Glancey is eminently qualified to write a history of Concorde. As the former architecture and design correspondent of the *Guardian* and the *Independent* and the author of a successful book on the Spitfire, he fully appreciates the aesthetics and science of aeronautical engineering, and the lucidity of his prose makes his complex subject clearly comprehensible, altogether educational and intermittently entertaining.

He relates how a Supersonic Transport Aircraft Committee, with Morien Morgan as chairman, met in London in 1956 to consider the feasibility of a project that would enhance national prestige, and how it became apparent that the development of a supersonic airliner would be too expensive for British private enterprise, so it had to be subsidised by the associated governments of Britain and France. In this collaboration there was inevitable niggling over details.

There was an international debate to decide whether the name should be Concord or Concorde. Tony Benn, the Minister of Technology, soothingly pointed out that he stood for 'excellence, England, Europe and Entente', and the French spelling prevailed.

A special alloy had to be concocted to protect the plane's skin against the heat of friction. At full speed at the cruising altitude, the tip of the nose reached a temperature of 127°C, even though the outside air temperature was minus 59°C. Aerodynamicists refined the shape of Concorde until it became the most elegantly streamlined airliner of all time. After 5,495 hours of tests, in wind tunnels and in flight, Concorde went into commercial service in 1976. There was a hiatus after a crash on take-off at Charles de Gaulle airport in 2000, but service continued the next year until economic pressure ended it finally in 2003. The return fare then was £8,000. I was glad in those days that newspapers and magazines paid my travel expenses.

# Gone, but not forgotten

Michael Bywater

## Fallen Glory: The Lives and Deaths of Twenty Lost Buildings from the Tower of Babel to the Twin Towers

by James Crawford

Old Street Publishing, £25, pp. 602,

ISBN 9781908699930

Spectator Bookshop, £22.50

## Ruins and Fragments: Tales of Loss and Rediscovery

by Robert Harbison

Reaktion Books, £20, pp. 272,

ISBN 9781780234472

Spectator Bookshop, £18

Here are two books which have almost nothing in common: form, function, source material, methodology, all utterly different.

The surprise is that I should be surprised. Loss and rediscovery is at the core of what writers mostly deal with. We all experience loss (lovers, spectacles, innocence, our very existences) and that universality allows each of us to shape it as we will.

James Crawford's approach is structurally simple, but his narrative is beguiling. He considers the life-span of 20 buildings — including the Tower of Babel (5000 BC to 323 BC), the Library of Alexandria (300 BC to AD 650), the Berlin Wall (1961 to 1989) and, provocatively, the web 'settlement' of Geocities, born in 1994 and deliberately and utterly obliterated by its owners in 2009.

Crawford tells the intricate biography of each of his buildings with the unspoken assumption that in some way a building (like the city in which it exists) is alive. He rehearses the conception of each building, the world into which it was born, the purpose it served and the people who shaped it.

The result is a cabinet of curiosities, a book of wonders with unexpected excursions and jubilant and haunting marginalia, such as — picked at random — the musician, poet and polymath Ziryab ('blackbird') who came to Cordoba to the court of Abd al-Rahman II and brought 10,000 songs, short haircuts, and the perfumes of ambergris, musk and camphor.

Ideas spin off ideas and facts off facts like a marvellous clattering snooker-table, so that a discursive critique of *Fallen Glory* would be three times as long as the book itself, and quite mad. But Crawford has managed to keep the thing under calm control. He moves happily from Foreign Office telegrams to Allenby to Gibbon's lie about sitting in the ruined Capitol of Rome and hearing monks chanting in the Temple of Jupiter, where they hadn't been for ages. He points us at the infelicitous 9/11 Memorial quote from Vergil ('No day shall erase



*The Tower of Babel* by Lucas van Valckenborch, 1591

you from the memory of time') which is not only a pretty poor translation but also refers to the savagery of Nisus and Euryalus, gay lovers and terrorist butchers who, when captured and butchered themselves went joyfully, as martyrs, to their deaths — 'a sentiment', says Crawford, 'fitting more closely with the hijackers of 11 September than with their victims'.

Here's a letter from Aristeas, a scholar at the Alexandria library, to his brother Philocrates, setting out the scope of the operation; here's the aisle of the old St Paul's turned into a hotbed of news and gossip; here's Jeremy Bentham getting overexcited about the St Petersburg Panopticon; here, in short, is everything exemplified, from wit to greed, violence to tranquillity, savagery to civility.

If there's a lesson here, it's that what Frank Lloyd Wright had to say about the skyscraper was true of so many of humanity's great works:

Millions of tons of brick and stone go high up into thin air... Therefore millions of tons of stone and brick will have to come down again. Come down when? Come down how?

In new St Paul's is Christopher Wren's epitaph, got up by his son: *Lector, si monumentum requiris, circumspice*. But Crawford serves to remind us that one day we may, as exhorted, look about us and see no monument except, perhaps, rubble. As the witless patois of Islamic State continue with their blood-sodden expunging of Palmyra (which happened after Crawford

went to press) we can remind ourselves that, like the Roman *damnatio memoriae*, obliteration can serve to perpetuate rather than obscure. We see the rubble and ask 'What was there, once?' 'The site of a great civilisation, destroyed by fools long since gone to ignominy and damnation. Here is the tale of how stupid they were...'

Robert Harbison's *Ruins and Fragments* is a different kettle of fish entirely. The title is, of course, an echo of *The Waste Land*: 'These fragments I have shored against my ruin.' Harbison has been chipping meticulously away at the intersection between architecture and performance, between style and intention, and potential and ruin, for his entire career. *Ruins* is not an easy book but it's a rewarding one. The reader who sees the point of what he's trying to do will find it a finely turned spur to thought, whether it's about Parisian galleries, *Finnegans Wake*, Montaigne, the *Iliad*, Detroit and the many other fragments we shore, not against our ruin, but as the very foundations of the post-modern world.

The crucial thing is that to read Harbison one needs not only a sympathy with deconstruction as a critical strategy, but also a sense that, whatever Derrida may have said, there is an awful lot beyond the text. A text, of course, needn't just be words, it can be any artefact made up of signs; and any building is a welter of signs and, in its ruin, of equally eloquent fragments. Sometimes the reader has to do much of the shoring up, and personally I love that sort of thing. But, as they so annoyingly say, your mileage may vary.

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## Cookery books for Christmas

### Rose Prince

Timing is everything, and few cookbooks come at an apter moment than *Mamushka* (Mitchell Beazley, £25) by the excellently named Ukrainian-born Olia Hercules. It is too easy to pun on her strengths, but in these flamboyant recipes and stories, Hercules lifts up not just the cooking of her country but that of others in the former Eastern Bloc out of grey culinary oblivion.

‘Mamushka’ is an invented word, used by Hercules to describe the strong women in her life; her mother, aunts and cousins, not all Ukrainian but with roots in Bessarabia, Siberia, Armenia and Uzbekistan. All were great cooks, and Hercules says she includes very few of her own recipes. This food is as special as Hercules promises — and she writes beautifully about it, too.

This cooking fits as snugly into a British kitchen as Mediterranean or the current trend for Nordic (about which more later), if not more so. With rich and meaty soups for winter, cut through with a ping of acidity from gherkin, sorrel or olive, then herby, multi-coloured salads for summer, fun-to-make noodle dishes and a superb chapter on never seen before breads, this is 2015’s most exciting cookbook.

It is a great year for discoveries, however. Andrew Wong cooks Chinese food in the restaurant once run by his parents in Pimlico, for a following that is easily described as cultish. Being one such cultist I can say that his is a mixture of hugely improved interpretations — his baked roasted pork buns is the giveaway secret recipe of the decade — and his own creativity.

Wong was not meant to be a chef. Finishing his immaculate education with a degree from the LSE, he did the opposite of what his parents dreamed. ‘I am supposed to be a doctor, lawyer or banker as these are professions that my parents can openly tell their friends about when the weekly round of “whose-kids-are-the-most-successful” begins at the dinner table,’ he writes.

Thank heavens he dropped out. His dim sum include astonishing Shanghai dumplings, part filled with pork, part with meat jelly that liquefies to soup when steamed, making these a very interesting and sometimes nicely messy eating experience. The puffs and pot-stickers then give way to fascinating street food snacks, finally mains and then sharing dishes. There is food in *A Wong: The Cookbook* (Mitchell Beazley, £25) for home cooks, but it is also a chef’s book. May every aspiring one buy it. If they did, Chinese food in Britain would go through a true revolution.

Daniel de la Falaise’s first book *Nature’s Larder: Cooking with the Senses* (Rizzoli,



Guillemot eggs, Iceland. From *The Nordic Cookbook* by Magnus Nilsson (Phaidon)

£25) is all about the detail in great cooking and respect for ingredients. I have been looking for some time for a book that takes the classics and gives you the perfect result — and this is it. The essentials: vinaigrette, mayonnaise, risotto, tartare, poached fish and crustaceans, perfectly grilled and

#### *A recipe for braised Pilot Whale, and others for puffin and seal soup, tell the whole truth about Nordic food*

roasted beef, pot-au-feu and crème brûlée are all there, illustrated as old masters. De la Falaise took his training from some great chefs and can be totally trusted — a vital book if you seriously want to get it right.

The Swedish chef Magnus Nilsson’s introduction to *The Nordic Cookbook* (Phaidon, £29.95) grumbles that recent English-language Nordic cookbooks give the impression that throwing a few lingonberries into a dish is midnight sun all over. Nilsson, patron of the greatly acclaimed Faviken restaurant close to the Arctic Circle, spent a long time on his huge book, probably a dark winter or three, and he has given the whole story. Foraged fungi and berries, mosses, reindeer, a great many fish, breads gloriously fat and thin are here in very appetising form. Yet some galling and bloody images of whale slaughter, a recipe for braised Pilot Whale, and others for puffin and seal soup, tell the whole truth about food from this region. A brave, beautiful

and necessarily honest book for the collection.

Talking of real, Nigel Slater is back with another journal of recipes. *A Year of Good Eating: The Kitchen Diaries III* (Fourth Estate, £30) is as original as ever, showing how to adapt ingredients to the mood of the day. There are hints of travel — to Japan, notably; with gyoza dumplings stuffed with pork and lemon grass, braised steak and sake, and a ‘spring soup of young leeks and miso’ (one for the January detox). With his European ingredients Slater is on great form and I have earmarked a game pie with parsnip crisps to make one weekend soon. Jonathan Lovekin’s photography makes me drool, as usual.

More comfort food comes in a second, just as stylishly packaged, book from Russell Norman, originator of the Polpo chain of restaurants. *Spuntino: Comfort Food (New York Style)* (Bloomsbury, £25) connects to Norman’s love affair with the Big Apple and its curious mix of food, from bastardised Italian dishes like macaroni and pizza, to great piles of dill-infused salads and eggy brunch plates. As with Polpo, Norman serves up his ideas scaled down in size, with a lighter and healthier touch. You will get to know ‘sliders’, which are sort of small hamburgers with stuffings of meat or fried fish, leaves, sauce and pickle; and you might make his peanut-butter-icecream-and-jelly ‘sandwich’, too, for a laugh. Here’s the ultimate brunch and lunch Bible.

I’ve been debating healthy-eating books with cookery-writing colleagues a lot over the last year. Is there such a thing as ‘clean food’? Should coconut oil stay an ingredient in suntan lotion (affirmative)? And who wants to glow, anyway? I am one for an ever-handy powder compact, frankly. Nutrition is being rewritten right now, and it will take some time, but I bet we get back to eating a balance of everything — and that includes bread but also butter and red meat (ye vegan bigots). Recently we celebrated the news that eating eggs does not contribute to cardiovascular disease after all.

To end with something that is all about the beginning of life, this may account for *Egg: The Very Best Recipes Inspired by the Simple Egg* (Weidenfeld, £22) by another emerging star, Blanche Vaughan. It is nicely obsessive and puts the egg back on high, with sauces and omelettes, fîles flottantes, soufflés and Toad-in-the-hole. I’m glowing already, in anticipation.

# He knew he was right

## Roy Foster

### Éamon de Valera: A Will to Power

by Ronan Fanning  
Faber, £20, pp. 320,  
ISBN 9780571312054  
Spectator Bookshop, £17

A highlight of this year's Dublin Theatre Festival was the Rough Magic Theatre Company's production of *The Train*, a musical by Arthur Riordan and Bill Whelan. Political theatre at its wittiest and craziest, it told the story of the fledgling Irish Women's Liberation Movement's publicised trip in 1971 to Belfast to buy contraceptives, ostentatiously importing these banned Satanic devices back into the Republic, where the law obeyed the writ of the Catholic church. Watching it, one was reminded of the sheer extent of theocracy in Éamon de Valera's Ireland (he remained president till 1973, having been Taoiseach for most of the period from 1932 to 1959), and the long journey from those days to this year's equal marriage referendum. Ronan Fanning's crisp, economical but deeply thought-provoking biography anatomises de Valera's influence, and reminds us just how transformed the country is since his heyday.

Fanning lays great emphasis on de Valera's difficult early life, heavily disguised in the official biography — which was more or less dictated by the man himself to his supine and complaisant hagiographers (prominent among them Lord Longford). He was born to an Irish servant-girl and an obscure Spaniard in New York in 1882, and his parents were soon separated. His father died and his mother sent the two-year-old child back to relations in County Limerick, more or less rejecting him forthwith.

Fanning's description of 'engineering a separation' is well put. The boy's early years on a tiny and impoverished farm were miserable, but he pulled himself out of it by the traditional Irish route of education, managing to get to the elite Holy Ghost Fathers' Blackrock College, where he was blissfully happy; he stayed there for holidays rather than returning to Limerick, and in many ways it remained the emotional centre of his life.

Marked out to be an academic or a priest, his involvement in Gaelic League activities in the early years of the new century led him into the paramilitary nationalist volunteer movement — and also into matrimony, as he fell in love with and married his Irish teacher. But he was not prominent in nationalist politics until 1916, when he commanded a garrison in the Easter Rising. He had joined the secret Irish Republican Brotherhood shortly before, but was never comfortable with taking the oath, as

it conflicted with his devout Catholicism. Here as elsewhere, however, he would find devious and sophisticated routes to rationalise apparent contradictions, in a spirit closer to Jesuits than Holy Ghosts.

As practically the only unexecuted 1916 leader (he survived principally because he was unknown, as Fanning pithily judges), he emerged from jail the acknowledged leader of the rapidly radicalising Sinn Féin movement. Tall, ascetic, dignified, and with a gift for leadership as well as a charismatic force of will, his dominance was not universally welcomed. A long visit to the USA in 1919–20 sowed seeds of discontent, which may have prefigured the traumatic disagreement over the Anglo-Irish Treaty that ended the guerrilla war of independence in 1921.

De Valera led the dissidents who refused to accept the (slightly detached) Commonwealth status given to the new Irish Free State under the terms of the Treaty — even though it essentially differed very little from ideas he had floated beforehand. But his near-inexplicable refusal to join the delegates who went to London to negotiate it, and Arthur Griffith's and Michael Collins's disastrous decision to sign it without referring the terms back to Dublin, ushered in a savage civil war, with de Valera on the losing side. From the political wilderness he

negotiated his way back via Fianna Fáil, the political party he founded in 1926 — a manoeuvre also requiring fancy footwork about taking an oath, this time acknowledging the British monarch as head of the Commonwealth. Six years later he entered his long period of dominance, ruling Ireland hand-in-glove with the Catholic hierarchy: an Irish Salazar or Franco.

Fanning points out, fairly, that there were many achievements to de Valera's credit in the period 1932–48, in terms of foreign policy and taking a firm line with

*De Valera ruled Ireland hand-in-glove with the Catholic hierarchy — an Irish Salazar or Franco*

subversive activities from his old IRA colleagues; despite Ireland's wartime neutrality and the longstanding mutual antipathy between Churchill and himself, he also managed Anglo-Irish relations skilfully. The stability of Irish society owed something to his autocracy, though he did nothing to stem the emigration to better opportunities abroad and very rarely even acknowledged it. Instead, Fanning astutely establishes that de Valera himself remained obsessed by the disastrous aftermath of the Treaty, and the

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Roman, c. AD 14–20.

need to believe that he had behaved correctly and defensibly.

This is not his biographer's belief, nor can it withstand the fair-minded, forensic but damning verdict here — that he rejected the Treaty not because it was a compromise, but because it was not his compromise, and must bear responsibility for the subsequent 'wading through blood' (his own phrase). Jealousy of Collins and dislike of Griffith may also have played a part, but de Valera never admitted to moral failings. Time and again an inability to accept the ideas or achievements of others recurs, along with an odd punctilio and pedantry — notoriously so when he paid a visit of condolence to the German Legation after Hitler's suicide. Yet as is clearly shown here, he had been firmly if covertly on the Allied side during the war, weighting Irish neutrality very much to the British advantage, and eschewing the pro-German and Anglophobic attitudes of many of his political (and diplomatic) colleagues.

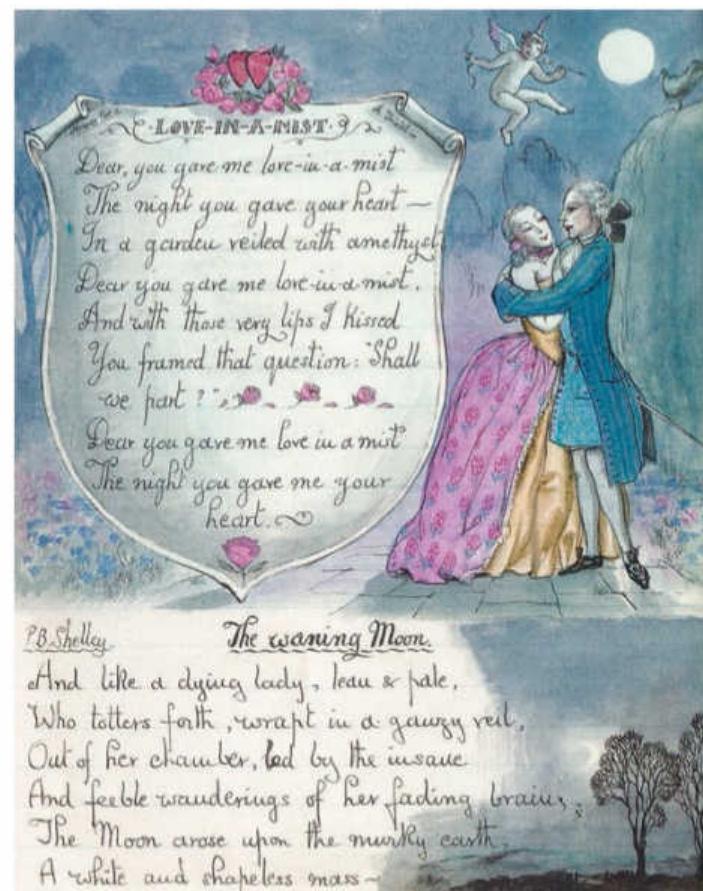
Similarly his affections lay with rugby rather than Gaelic football, and he sustained a warm relationship with Trinity College, then seen as a bastion of Anglo-Irish values. But his dream of a devoutly Catholic, rural, unmaterialist Ireland, where the hierarchy had every right to dictate social legislation, persisted — along with similarly unrealistic anti-Partition crusades, contradicting his private admissions that Northern Unionists were not going to be persuaded into the Republic, and could not be compelled by force of arms. A very different line would be taken on both of these issues — material gain, and the Northern question — by Charles Haughey, and Fanning recounts evidence that de Valera clearly saw him as a malign influence on Fianna Fáil.

That disgraced figure would reign over a very different Ireland in the late 20th century: a period when, as Trollope remarked of 1870s Britain,

dishonesty magnificent in its proportions, and climbing into high places, became at the same time so rampant and so splendid that there seemed to be reason for fearing that men and women would be taught to feel that dishonesty, if it can become splendid, will cease to become abominable.

De Valera cannot be blamed for this, though his own honesty was variable and self-serving — he could never admit the impropriety of his control and ownership of the powerful Irish Press empire, for instance.

This judicious, well-researched, elegantly written and admirably succinct biography might, in fact, have taken another Trollope reference for its title: *He Knew He Was Right*. We are not told what the then president thought of the radical Irishwomen storming the customs barriers with pills and condoms in 1971, but I think we can guess. And it presaged the end of his era.



## Loneliness and the love of friends

Douglas Murray

### Rex Whistler: **Inspirations (two-volume boxed set): Love and War; Family, Friendships, Landscapes**

by Hugh and Mirabel Cecil  
Pimpernel Press, £30, pp. 192,  
ISBN 9781910258422  
Spectator Bookshop, £25.50

### An Anthology of Mine

by Rex Whistler, with additional material by Laurence Whistler and Hugh and Mirabel Cecil  
Pimpernel Press, £40, pp. 88,  
ISBN 9781910258156  
Spectator Bookshop, £34

When Hugh and Mirabel Cecil's book *In Search of Rex Whistler* was published in 2012, the late Brian Sewell reviewed it with typical insight and lack of generosity. Despite recognising the artist as an extraordinary talent and perhaps the inventor of neo-romanticism, he regretted that Whistler would never be taken sufficiently seriously and pronounced it the last book on him.

Happily the Cecils have now proved Sewell wrong several times over. Hugh

Facsimile pages from Rex Whistler's *An Anthology of Mine*

Cecil's father, David, was a close friend of the artist, and these volumes seem in part to constitute the continuation of a family's love for a man who inspired affection wherever he went. Along with a recent book by Anna Thomasson on Whistler's friendship with Edith Olivier, exhibitions in London and Salisbury and a growing interest in Whistler's work at auction, they suggest there may even be a revival under way.

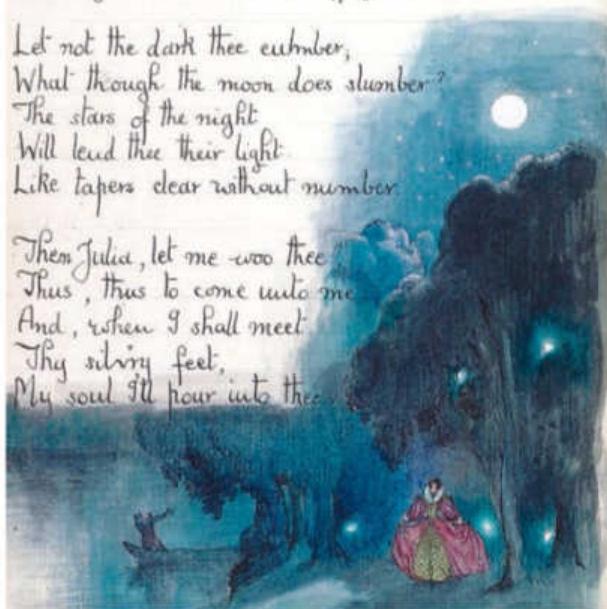
It is true that there are challenges. Whistler's most significant works are probably his murals, and apart from the one magnificently restored in the Tate restaurant (where the food does not remotely live up to the walls) they are slightly tricky to access. The finest is in Plas Newydd. Another is at Dorneywood, currently the Chancellor's weekend retreat and open to the public only for a fortnight each year. Otherwise, having to earn his own way in the world, Whistler spent much of his time engaged in commissions for book and magazine covers as well as stage-designs. And then there is the terrible fact that having joined up at the start of the war — and after years training as a tank commander — Whistler was killed in Normandy on his first day of action in July 1944, aged 39.

His technical skill was dazzling from the start. In his first year at the Slade Whistler copied some of his favourite poems into a notebook and decorated them with striking and often moving watercolours. His devot-

But on, on thy way,  
Not making a stay.  
Since ghost there's none to affright thee.

Let not the dark thee cumber,  
Whil' though the moon does slumber?  
The stars of the night  
Will lead thee their light  
Like tapers clear without number.

Then Julia, let me woo thee  
Thus, thus to come unto me  
And, when I shall meet  
Thy silv'ry feet,  
My soul I'll pour into thee.



*La Belle Dame sans merci*  
O what can ail thee, Knight-at-arms,  
Alone & palely loitering?  
The sedge has withered from the Lake  
And no birds sing.

O what can ail the Knight-at-arms!  
So haggard & so woe-begone?  
The squirrel's granary is full  
And the harvest's done.

I see a lily on thy brow  
With anguish moist & fever-dew,  
And on thy cheeks a fading rose  
Faint withereth too.

I met a Lady in the meads,  
Full beautiful — a faery's child,  
Her hair was long, her foot was light  
And her eyes were wild.



ed brother Laurence published a facsimile of *An Anthology of Mine* in 1981 as part of his constant efforts to keep Rex's reputation alive, but this return to print is even more handsome. Indeed it is a treasure of contemporary bookmaking. The other two Cecil volumes do not greatly add to their 2012 book, but their purpose appears to be to act as shorter introductions and to handsomely bring back into print examples of their subject's work which have become difficult to find.

They are reminders of just how much Whistler achieved in the half a life that he had. The portraits from the war years — particularly the self-portrait on his first day in uniform, and some of his fellow soldiers — must count as among the greatest British portraits from those years. The often cartoonish character of his early figures has transformed into a fully-controlled and mature mastery of oils. The fact that the works are so few means that as we read here of pieces he put together for the amusement of his fellow soldiers (such as the set he painted for a 'security show' while his regiment was awaiting embarkation) one wants to know every detail.

Despite having a huge circle of friends, Whistler was always unlucky in love. But it was probably not for that reason alone that he wrote to one female friend, after the last party he attended before leaving for France:

How much I loved every minute of that lovely, crazy, unnecessary, enchanting evening, filled with real laughter and affection and friendship, yet, for me, somehow grief-stricken. In the midst of so much happiness and fun, I felt a desolate sense of loneliness.

Today too few of Whistler's works are on public display — or prominently enough displayed when they are. His position in British art remains badly underestimated. But surely the next book that needs to be added to the growing bibliography is a volume of his letters. Preferably with facsimiles of those in which he entertained his friends with exquisite drawings of what he, or his imagination, had seen. From an artist around whom feelings of 'what might have been' will always remain, making available as widely as possible what might otherwise have slipped into oblivion has passed from being the role of Whistler's friends into that of anyone who cares about 20th-century British art.



Lady Caroline Paget. Pencil drawing made at Plas Newydd, Anglesey, c. 1936

## Life in the chain gang Jon Day

### The Racer

by David Millar

Yellow Jersey, £20, pp. 304,

ISBN 9780224100069

Spectator Bookshop, £17

In 2004, French police officers searching the home of the professional cyclist David Millar found some syringes and empty phials hidden in a hollowed-out book. Millar confessed that he had been using the substance EPO to boost his red-blood-cell count. He was banned from the sport for two years, and returned to cycling a reformed man, becoming a prominent and vocal critic of doping in the professional peloton.

The rise and fall and rise of David Millar's cycling career formed the dramatic backdrop to his first memoir, *Riding Through the Dark* (2011). His second book, *The Racer*, is a more elegiac affair. It follows Millar through the twilight of his career, recording his frustration as he loses his position as the elder statesman of British cycling. Though we get hints about his past, here Millar wants to present himself as a 'stand-up member of society rather than the twisted and damaged doper I have previously been'.

Millar first became a professional cyclist when, as he writes, 'doping was rife and ethics were something that we knew of, yet rarely saw put into practice'. In *The Racer* it's easy to see how one might be tempted to enjoy the not-so-marginal gains provided by doping. Cycling emerges here not just as a

more demanding sport than many others, but as a far more intrusive one. The cycling gaze is as omniscient as it is pitiless. The weight of riders is monitored more closely than that of catwalk models (many go on to develop eating disorders). Every rider knows their own body's fat content, their VO<sub>2</sub> max levels and the amount of lactic acid — down to the milligram — their bodies can handle. It's a life lived under intense scrutiny, and there isn't much room to hide.

But the real cruelty of the sport, as Millar describes it, is that a racing cyclist is only ever as good as his or her condition. Cyclists don't really have a transferable skill set: within weeks of stopping training, a professional cyclist won't be any more impressive a rider than your average enthusiastic amateur. 'Our magic is our physical condition,' writes Millar, 'the ability to be super-trained. When we stop training the magic goes; very quickly we are indistinguishable from any other person. With us it's gone the moment we hang it up, and the sooner we realise this the better.'

The book is written as a series of more or less coherent diary entries, loosely following the racing calendar of Millar's last years on the road (one suspects the organising hand of a ghost writer is absent here). The style is often like that of an eager teenager: 'Fucketyfuck, not good' thinks Millar as he realises he's become the oldest rider in the team; the Tour of Qatar is a 'crashtastic' race; devotees of the 'monuments' — some of the most demanding cycling classics — are 'crazy-batshit'. After one particularly bad crash Millar lies in the road and thinks, with no regard for cliché, 'I'm too old for this shit.'

He's at his best when he's describing, in straightforward prose born of familiarity, the feeling of the road: the *umwelt* of the professional peloton, the sheer pain of pushing yourself during a time-trial, the existential horrors of meeting, as racing cyclists put it, 'the man with the hammer'. He's good too on the exquisite terror of a big crash and the pain of recovering from one without using painkillers (due to his team's stringent anti-doping policy). The death of Wouter Weylandt, who crashed during a descent in the 2011 Giro d'Italia and died of his injuries, is a sobering reminder of the real dangers of this most demanding of sports.

There's plenty of score-settling here too: the pain of not being selected by his team to ride in the 2014 Tour de France is obviously still very raw. Indeed Millar doesn't win very much at all during this, his final year in the chain gang. Not that this seems to matter very much, for it's the ride that counts. 'During these last two years I've spent more time being made to suffer than making people suffer,' he writes. 'I'm slowly, and softly, being killed off. The decline is apparent.'

Cycling has always been about a great deal more than its winners, and *The Racer* is quite a ride.

## Too much gush

### Claire Lowdon

#### The Little Red Chairs

by Edna O'Brien

Faber, £18.99, pp. 320,

ISBN 9780571316281

Spectator Bookshop, £16.14

The cover of Edna O'Brien's 17th novel sports a handsome quote from Philip Roth: 'The great Edna O'Brien has written her masterpiece.' Late Roth and late O'Brien have something in common. In *The Plot Against America* (2004), Roth provided an alternative history of the 20th century: what if Roosevelt had been defeated by the anti-Semitic Charles Lindbergh? O'Brien, whose stellar career began 55 years ago with her wonderful debut, *The Country Girls* (1960), is increasingly interested in exploring real-life events. *Down by the River* (1997) fictionalised the true story of a 14-year-old rape victim, while *In the Forest* (2002) was inspired by the Cregg Wood murders of 1994.

In *The Little Red Chairs*, the real-life starting point is Radovan Karadžić, indicted in 2008 for his role in the Bosnian genocide. Karadžić's alias during his years as a fugitive was Dr Dragan David Dabi. O'Brien's ver-

sion of Karadžić calls himself Dr Vladimir Dragan. While in hiding, Karadžić practised alternative medicine; O'Brien's Dr Vladimir opens a clinic called 'Holistic Healing in Eastern and Western Disciplines'. The crucial difference is that Dr Vlad is hiding not in Belgrade but in the sleepy Irish town of Cloonoila. It's no coincidence that both his names recall Count Dracula. Before we know Vlad is a war criminal, he is a suave yet vampiric figure, preying on Cloonoila because he senses 'that primal innocence, lost to most places in the world'.

The novel describes the town's initial seduction by Dr Vlad. The draper's wife Fidelma is particularly mesmerised, and they begin an affair with the express intention of helping fortysomething Fidelma conceive. By the time the authorities catch up with Vlad, Fidelma is pregnant. Three of Vlad's old enemies kidnap Fidelma and rape her with a crowbar to kill her unborn child. 'We kill anything of his... we kill his cat.'

Fidelma runs away to England. There, every minor character she encounters has a story to tell, usually in the ubiquitous broken English of the immigrant ('I think I have breakdown in some centre in Holland'), usually detailing a flight from atrocities to a demeaning job in the UK. The intention, presumably, is to create a cacophony of victims' voices, a chorus of the dispossessed in contrast to Vlad's tyrannical solo performance. But it's hard not to feel that the novel leans too heavily on its imported subject matter at the expense of form and characterisation.

There are also problems with the prose. O'Brien seems to be reaching indiscriminately for the breathless, under-punctuated poetic anacoluthon glimpsed in Hemingway. This is voiced for one of Vladimir's Bosnian associates, but it sounds suspiciously like the novel's third-person narration as well as other sections spoken by Cloonoila locals:

Another incident that caught the attention of the world was a little girl of 12 on her bicycle, oblivious, when a shell hit her and soon the blood rippled out, a leitmotif of red rose petals on discoloured yellowish snow.

Hemingway's headlong style is harder to imitate than you might think.

Those poetic bloody rose petals, moreover, are straight out of stock and as overemphatic as the repeated references to the book's title. In 2012, 11,541 empty red chairs lined Sarajevo high street, representing the number of Sarajeans killed during the siege. When Fidelma is raped, the blood 'comes churning out in fitful gushes'. 'Churning'. 'Gushes'. Overkill. Compare Hemingway, in *A Farewell to Arms*. The injured narrator Frederic Henry is lying in an ambulance, and the man in the stretcher above him is haemorrhaging. 'At first it dropped slowly and regularly, then it pattered into a stream.' Then the man dies. 'The

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drops fell very slowly, as they fall from an icicle after the sun has gone.' It's a masterful simile from a master writer. Sadly, the same cannot be said about the Edna O'Brien of *The Little Red Chairs*.

## Celebrity lives

### Julie Burchill

I learned from this little lot that if one has read *The Diary of a Nobody*, then one can derive pleasure from even the most pedestrian life story, as there's always an unintentional chuckle to be had. The former racing driver Nigel Mansell's *Staying on Track* (Simon & Schuster, £20) delighted me with its Pooterish charms, from bullied boyhood:

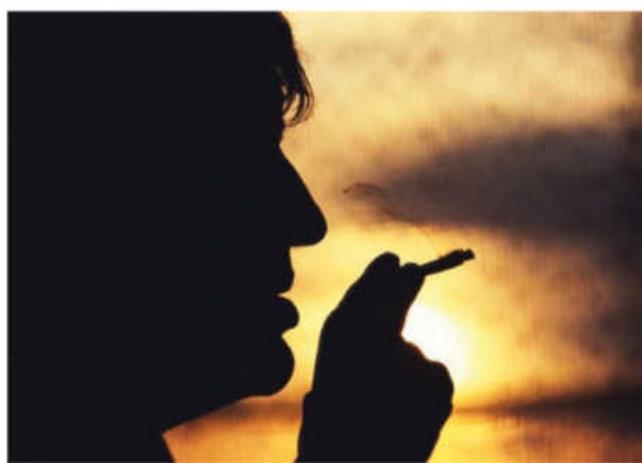
One time I was due to race for England abroad. The school announced the exciting news in assembly one morning... that afternoon I was attacked viciously with a cricket bat in the playground. I thought the other children would be proud of me. How wrong can you be?

— to triumphant adulthood, bashing himself up for pleasure and profit:

Let me tell you about the time I told a priest to get lost. Yes, you'd think that's not one of my finest moments, not least because I am not a fan of swearing and I have a lot of respect for the church. However, I do have an excuse, of sorts. I was nearly dead.

I have a crush on Alan Sugar and blush to admit that I bought *Unscripted: My Ten Years in Telly* (Macmillan, £20) the day before the review copy arrived. At a time when Sugar's beloved Labour party is so hostile to the likes of him (Jewish, patriotic, go-getting, keen on employing tough women in top jobs), the tale of the boy from the Hackney council flat who made a fortune in computers and then built another career encouraging non-entrepreneurs to laugh at the pomposity and ineptitude of Keystone Kapitalists on *The Apprentice* — his entire fee going to Great Ormond Street Hospital — is poignant and somewhat nostalgic, as well as a laugh. Sugar's is a more knowing Pooterism than Mansell's; there's a bit in *Nobody* when our hero sits up in bed thinking of something he said earlier and 'laughed until the bed shook' whereas Sugar muses: 'I can be a little bit witty at times, and it went down well with the audience.' A triumph. Every home should have two copies.

What makes a showbiz success is not that little something extra, as legend has it, but rather that little something missing. Both Paul O'Grady — a loner in leopard-skin — and Steve Coogan — a grudge-holder in high dudgeon — exemplify this overwhelming desire to be looked at, and then, mission accomplished, to disappear and be seen only fleetingly and on their terms. In the case of Coogan this is as a



Howard Marks: the dreary life of a drugs dealer

pure scourge of the gutter press (i.e. any hack who reveals him to be a rollicking roué — as if there was anything bad about being one) who seems willing, via the vilely self-serving Hacked Off group, to sacrifice hard-won collective freedom for nothing more honourable than personal privacy. Even if I didn't have a hack-shaped axe to grind, I'd find *Easily Distracted* (Century, £20) an utter stinker. It's startling that the super-talented creator of the ultimate manic humbug Alan Partridge has turned out to be an utter Everton mint himself. Like the Grossmith brothers went to work in an insurance office!

In the case of O'Grady — far more honourably — he is now mostly found howling over homeless hounds on prime-time TV; mind you, when you write as gorgeously as he does in the fourth volume of his

*Alan Sugar's memoir is a triumph — every home should have two copies*

memoirs, *Open the Cage, Murphy* (Bantam, £20), drag-cabaret's loss is the lending library's gain. No whiff of Pooter here, but definitely a hint of Victor Meldrew in marabou trim crossed with Alan Bennett in a feather boa.

While O'Grady puts his gayness slap-bang in the centre of the pound-shop window and garlands it shrieking with tinsel, there will forever be a whiff of our-little-secret about Paul Gambaccini's sexuality. Maybe it's that insinuating voice or those hooded eyes? In the introduction to *Love, Paul Gambaccini: My Year Under the Yewtree* (Biteback, £20) we learn that if Mr G had been born a girl, his parents would have called him Nancy and that even as a baby he was a fuss-bucket: 'For the first two weeks of my life I could not keep food down; doctors feared I might have been born with an inverted stomach.' Whether these two occurrences are connected is anyone's guess.

And that's not the only ambiguous organ our hero has: 'During the 1970s my sex life was limited to women, but my identification was with gay men. It was not until the 1980s that I finally fully made love to a man.' This is just asking for trouble; sex is, like it or not, the lingua franca of our age, and if an adult man does not assert his preference for either adult men or for adult women, it is likely that society will judge his sexual preference to be

animal, vegetable or juvenile.

The police have rather less to do with this state of affairs than the Roman Catholic church of Gambaccini's forebears and their centuries of hardly hidden child abuse; maybe he should take it up with them rather than the coppers. Gloriously pompous, he asks an arresting officer 'Is this what you wanted to do when you grew up?' without apparently seeing the humour in a near-pensionable 'disc jockey' telling a man responsible for enforcing the law of the land that his work is worthless. Nice to know that Pooterism is an international language and rolls off the tongue of an Italian-American to the manor born.

There is nothing of the Bard of Holloway about Howard Marks's prose; it's far too blunt and elegant for that. 'It is no secret that a drug smuggler does not like hard work,' he writes in *Mr Smiley: My Last Pill and Testament* (Macmillan, £18.99) of 'the one thing that made me feel truly alive'. But the minutiae of all the endless waiting, tasting, chasing, praying and evading quickly becomes far drearier to read about than a law-abiding 19th-century clerk's daily grind. Pooter is redeemed from banality by his childlike, vivifying love for his friends and family, whereas every single person apart from Marks himself is a shadow here; only the drug experiences are vivid. This may be discretion, or it may be a blind spot which reflects badly on a lifetime of getting blasted. Anyway, Marks redeems himself slightly at the end by waiting for his imminent death from cancer with a stoicism worthy of the ultimate law-abiding 19th-century clerk.

The current memoir market is nothing if not democratic: reality-show studs and starlets have their allegedly illiterate constituency flocking to buy their hardbacks, while the great and the good boasting huge hinterlands are remaindered within the month. Which just goes to prove — as if we needed telling — that everybody is somebody's nobody.

# Astonishing splashes of colour

Peter Hoskin celebrates Technicolor's 100th birthday

They've already found a cure for the common cold. It's called Technicolor. My first dose of it came during the Christmas holidays when I was about 12. There I was, ailing and miserable, when *The Adventures of Robin Hood* (1938) came on the television at the end of my bed. Nothing had prepared me for this. A Sherwood Forest that was aflame with green. Clothes that shimmered purple and blue. Olivia de Havilland's oh-so-cherry lips. Under two hours later I cast off the duvet and leapt from the fug. The sickness had gone.

I now know that this medicine, Three-strip Technicolor, was a revolutionary process, the first to properly mix the three primary colours of light — red, green and blue — so that film could capture all of the colours in nature. From this technique came movies such as *The Wizard of Oz* (1939), *Meet Me in St Louis* (1944) and *Singin' in the Rain* (1952). It's responsible for that hyper-saturated look we now associate with almost an entire era of cinema. It intensified colour, making nature appear preternatural.

Technicolor Motion Picture Corporation filed its start-up papers in Maine on 18 November 1915, 100 years ago this week. They weren't the only innovators in colour cinematography — let alone the first. Experiments with tinting film and with projecting it through filters had begun in the late 19th century. This new company would have to struggle past the competition, as well as the vicissitudes of the economy and of taste, to be remembered as it is.

Technicolor's incorporation date is a useful marker, but technological advancement doesn't really celebrate birthdays. It was three years earlier that an investor went to Herbert Kalmus, Daniel Comstock and W. Burton Westcott seeking their advice on a smoother form of motion-picture projection. None of these men cared much about Hollywood, but they were renowned scientists out to make a buck. They experimented far beyond their original remit and the investor ended up with a new system for shooting and screening colour films.

The first Technicolor experiments weren't, to be fair, so very different from what two British inventors had been doing with Kinemacolor since 1906. Both com-

panies filmed using red and green filters (neither had yet worked out a way of dealing with blue). But while Kinemacolor did this consecutively (one frame in red, one frame green), Technicolor filmed each and every frame in red and green simultaneously, which avoided the fuzz of Kinemacolor's output. The next question was how to project these two-tone films? The first Technicolor feature made this way, 1917's *The Gulf Between*, overwhelmed as cinemas struggled to synchronise two projections at once. Kalmus later complained that the system required 'an operator who was a cross between a college professor and an acrobat'.

Kalmus, who became the driving force behind Technicolor, was undeterred. The next development involved taking the red

*As with so much else in the 20th century, it took Walt Disney for things to really get going*

and green frames of footage, transferring them on to two separate pieces of dyed film strip, and sticking them together. This way, the colour was built into the combined strip. No filters were necessary. In scientific terms, this changed Technicolor from an additive to a subtractive process. In business terms, it made Technicolor much more viable. Cinemas could use their normal projectors.

With viability came interest. In 1926, Douglas Fairbanks lavished \$1 million of his own savings on a Technicolor production called *The Black Pirate*. The studios joined in with two-tone efforts such as *Doctor X* (1932). These films play as wonderful oddities nowadays. Their avoidance of blue gives them a brown and algal look, like antiquities.

But Technicolor still hadn't made it. There may have been interest, but there was little enthusiasm. Studio chiefs regarded this newfangled whatsit as an expense with few returns. It irritated some of their filmmakers, who resented the cumbersome equipment that was brought on set. Their actors believed that it erased the beautiful mysteries of shadow and light. And as for the public? They weren't particularly eager for more. After all, none of them had yet experienced the revelation of Dorothy's journey from sepia Kansas to the full-colour land of Oz.

As with so much else in the 20th century, it took the involvement of Walt Disney for things to really get going. He was approached by Kalmus in 1932. By that time, the three-strip system — now with added blue! — had been developed, and Walt liked what he saw. It was used for the animated short *Flowers and Trees* that same year. Then for Disney's first feature, *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* (1937). The movie-making community and the movie-going public were enthralled. This was the colour that they had been promised all along.

After years of invention and perseverance, the Age of Technicolor began. Like any age, it had its titans. Vincente Minnelli, who had always been interested in painting, quickly realised what a colour palette could mean — and he demonstrated it in movies such as *The Pirate* (1948) and *An American in Paris* (1951). The cinematographer Winton Hoch brought autumnal shade and sentiment to the Old West for *She Wore a Yellow Ribbon* (1949). Even actors began to revel in it. No one ever glittered like the Queen of Technicolor, Maria Montez, in *Cobra Woman* (1944).

But we Brits did it better than anyone else. Or, rather, three Brits did: the directorial team of Michael Powell and Emeric Pressburger with their frequent collaborator Jack Cardiff. Whether it's the joys of terrestrial existence in *A Matter of Life and Death* (1946), the encroaching exoticism of the Himalayas in *Black Narcissus* (1947), or the very redness of *The Red Shoes* (1948), theirs is Technicolor that you can feel. Synaesthesia for the masses.

The heights of Technicolor are among the heights of cinema, which brings a degree of sadness with it. Kalmus died in 1963, not long after his three-strip format had been supplanted by cheaper and easier varieties of photography. The Technicolor Motion Picture Corporation has since been bought, sold and repackaged many times. It now specialises in processing films that have already been shot by other means.

Still, there's always the solace of the unknown. From silence to sound to colour to 3D to whatever next, the art of film has always relied on technological development. It will yield other wonders.



*Judy Garland as Esther Smith in Meet Me in St Louis (1944)*



ENO's production of 'The Force of Destiny' has a large, fidgety set and a projection of a vast horse's head

## Opera Loose, baggy monster?

Michael Tanner

### The Force of Destiny

English National Opera, in rep until 4 December

### Le donne curiose

Guildhall School of Music

*The Force of Destiny*, ENO's latest offering to its 'stakeholders', as its audiences are now called thanks to Cressida Pollock, the new CEO, is perhaps Verdi's most interesting failure. It's an opera with too much fine, even magnificent, music to be neglected, but it doesn't add up to a satisfactory experience. Even epics, which *Force* is routinely categorised as, have their limits of accommodation. Henry James described *War and Peace* as 'a loose, baggy monster', but what would he have called *Force* if he had had the least interest in opera or music? There are times when we are longing for the central story of vengeance and fate to get a move on. The inserted episodes of low life are mainly of inferior quality; I'm thinking especially of Preziosilla, a gypsy but at ENO 'a soldier's widow'. Fra Melitone, the grouchy monk who loathes doing charity work, is musically interesting but dramatically null.

And the heroine, yet another ago-

nised Leonora, disappears from the action, retreating into her monastic cell, for most of the opera after Act II. *Force* doesn't so much end as peter out, with Leonora strangling herself, and her half-breed lover Alvaro vaguely hoping for redemption. No more adequate than the end of the next opera, *Don Carlo*, though there we care desperately about the characters and here we never get a chance to really understand them.

Everyone expects Calixto Bieito, the

*That this isn't a great evening is the responsibility of Verdi rather than this production*

director, to do something horribly colourful, but here he has opted for a black and grey view of the world, mainly black. The set designer Rebecca Ringst has supplied him with a large, fidgety set of house façades, permanently semi-collapsed, blank windows. There are many blown-up photographic projections — of people, especially children, and of an alarming vast horse's head: they are stirring. There is as little action as possible, and no props apart from a pistol and a bowl of gruel. The chorus, whether of monks, passers-by or soldiers, stands at the back, occasionally at the front, motionless. It is impressively bleak, and successful. The only colour, as one would expect, is red, the blood of her father on Leonora's hands, and on the Surgeon's uniform.

Of the principals, only Anthony

Michaels-Moore as Carlo, Leonora's brother, bent on avenging his father's accidental death at the hands of Alvaro, is a convincing actor. He was also, on the first night, in superb voice, and the dominating figure on the stage. Leonora is taken by the young American Tamara Wilson, who floated marvellous soft high notes, a speciality of Leonora's; she is still developing her middle register, but when she does is likely to be a major Verdi artist. Wisely Bieito did not require her to disguise herself as a man, so the historically minded might wonder if she would have been accepted into a monastic order, even in 1936, when this production is set. The most beautiful section of a deliberately unbeautiful score, the chanting of the monks with Leonora's voice soaring above them, was wonderful. Gwyn Hughes Jones as Alvaro, the opera's central character, lurched around clumsily but sang as powerfully as I have heard him. And the Father Superior, James Creswell, was sonorous enough to take his place in the grand tradition of singers of this role.

The conductor is Mark Wigglesworth, and the playing he draws from his orchestra is fantastic, if, for this piece, a bit over-refined. He opts to play the original overture, disconcerting to anyone who loves the usual version: he is right to say that the opening scene is flat after the heroics of the full-blown version, but it is flat, almost fatally so, anyway. The many instrumental solos were among the evening's most poignant moments, and balances were perfect. That this isn't a great evening is the responsibility of Verdi rather than this production.

I have space only to mention Wolf-Ferrari's *Le donne curiose*, which the Guildhall School of Music and Drama mounted as its termly production last week. It's a lightweight piece from this Italo-German composer, not his finest work, but fun. Ideal, in fact, for the GSMD, with a large cast, all of them fluent in Venetian. The production by Stephen Barlow was brilliant, the opera whizzed along, thanks to a combination of Mozartian and Falstaffian influences and energies. The curious women wonder what their menfolk are up to at their club, which turns out to be nothing more scandalous than eating and drinking. It's so good-natured as to be almost insipid, but the pace and brevity save it, certainly in this account.

# Magí Puig



*Salabror* oil on canvas 114 x 146 cms 44½ x 57½ ins

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*'Red and Yellow Vane', 1934, by Alexander Calder*

## Exhibitions

### Upwardly mobile

Martin Gayford

#### Alexander Calder: Performing Sculpture

Tate Modern, until 3 April 2016

One day, in October 1930, Alexander Calder visited the great abstract painter Piet Mondrian in his apartment in Paris. The Dutch artist had turned this small space on rue du Départ, which also doubled as his studio, into a walk-in work of art. Even his gramophone, painted bright red, had become a note of pure form and colour.

Calder was impressed by the squares and oblongs of the pictures all around. But he also asked a question: wouldn't it be fun to make these rectangles move? With a perfectly straight face Mondrian replied that this wasn't necessary: 'My paintings are already very fast.'

As I walked around *Performing Sculpture*, the new Calder exhibition at Tate Modern, I mused on which of them had got

the better of this exchange. In a free-association test, any art buff prompted with the word 'Calder' would immediately respond 'mobile'. This is because his distinctive contribution to modernism was to make abstract sculpture move.

Naturally, the galleries at Tate Modern are full of Calder's mobiles: suspended from the ceiling, rising on filigree arrangements like inverted coathangers from the floor. Quite often, if not quite always, they are indeed in motion, gently revolving on

#### *Calder's mobiles are the closest thing there is to flying sculpture*

currents of air from vents in the floor or the mild jetstream caused by critics walking past, notebooks in hands. It does not take much to make the mobiles stir, but visitors are strictly warned against doing so by touching them — or even blowing in their direction.

Worries about conservation have immobilised quite a few of the pieces in this exhibition. There are early sculptures equipped with home-made-looking mechanisms or hand-operated handles. Sadly, these amusing toys have grown too fragile, valuable

and art-historically important to flap or wave as their creator intended.

Others have been silenced. Intriguingly, Calder considered that sound was an important aspect of sculpture. He collaborated with composers and choreographers. Some of his works were intended to chime or collide randomly with objects. Again, however, these have become too precious to make a noise.

Calder's aerial sculptures are unquestionably beautiful: delicately balanced arrangements of forms like fluttering leaves, subatomic particles or celestial bodies, suspended from the lightest possible cat's cradle of wire. This is the opposite of the orthodox conception of sculpture from Michelangelo to Richard Serra: an art that is all about mass, weight and three-dimensional form. A typical Calder mobile seems to have almost no volume — its shapes are made from thin sheets of painted metal — and the whole point is about defying weight. This is the closest thing there is to flying sculpture; indeed one exhibit, entitled 'Blériot' (1949), resembles an early aeroplane.

You could get mildly hypnotised watching a mobile orbiting, some parts at a slower rate than others; but to my mind there is something missing. It doesn't much matter that, the question of mobility apart, Calder was highly derivative. Everybody has influences, and his are easy to spot: not much from Mondrian, but an awful lot of Miró and a touch of the Swiss painter/sculptor Jean Arp. There's a whole room of Calders that are in effect moving pictures in 3D — coloured rectangles with curving rods and cut-out silhouettes like amoebas, eggs and stars dangling in front of them like puppets in a toy theatre.

Wit and playfulness are the strengths — and perhaps the weaknesses — of Calder's work from the start. Before that fateful visit chez Mondrian, which sent him down an abstract path, Calder was a figurative artist. His early work revolved around a miniature circus, the Cirque Calder, of which he gave performances in his studio from time to time. For this he made acrobats and animals fashioned out of wire: it was an engaging and slightly naughty (the human performers are naked) form of drawing in space. The line was borrowed from Picasso, but the effect is individual and charming. Indeed, this is the most enjoyable room because the work here is less repetitive.

The trouble with the mobiles — for me — is that though individually they are delightful, they are all rather similar. None is really memorable, which might be because their shapes constantly shift. That is one of the paradoxes of art: still images can contain an immense amount of drama and action too. They do so, furthermore, in a way that sticks in your mind. So Mondrian got it right: his paintings were much better as they were, motionless. But possibly Calder's sculptures are actually more entertaining.

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Michael Fassbender as Steve Jobs

## Cinema

### Road to nowhere

Deborah Ross

**Steve Jobs**  
15, Nationwide

*Steve Jobs* is a film about a man in whom I have little interest, but for 120 minutes I was at least quite interested, which is a result. But this doesn't make it a great film, and in many ways it isn't. It never quite pins Jobs down. It never quite works out what it wishes to say about him. That he was such a 'genius' it didn't matter if he was also a bit of a dick? Or that it did matter, totally? Plus, the ending is calamitous. But it is well made, and the performances are ace, as is the dialogue, and I was kept interested, so the journey may well be worthwhile, even if the destination is not.

Directed by Danny Boyle, this is from a script by Aaron Sorkin who, among much else (*The West Wing*, *Moneyball*, *Charlie Wilson's War*), also wrote *The Social Network* about Facebook's Mark Zuckerberg, with whom Jobs (who was CEO of Apple until his death — my mother wouldn't know!) seems to have had much in common, if the two films are to be believed. Principally, both perfectly comprehended how people might wish to communicate, without having the faintest idea how to communicate themselves. How do you feel, the mother of Jobs's child asks him at one point, about me and our daughter being on welfare, when *Time* says your stock is valued at \$410 million? 'The stock,' he replies, not with deliberate cruelty, but because it's his world-view, 'is undervalued.' He had previously denied his

daughter's paternity, even after a DNA test had proved he was the father. Not a touch-feely man, in other words, and one with absolutely no care for the feelings of others, but as played by Michael Fassbender, who is riveting, you understand that he doesn't understand what he's not understanding. 'I am poorly made,' he even confesses, in a rare moment of self-awareness.

Travelling from the early Eighties to the late Nineties, this is a biopic deconstructed into three 40-minute acts that happen in real time backstage prior to the launches of the Apple Macintosh, the NeXTcube (his doomed computer for schools) and

#### *The journey is worthwhile even if the destination is not*

the iMac. The fact that Jobs is due on stage offers a narrative urgency, while the quick snap of Boyle's direction — the camera is on the move all the time, but not to exhausting, *Birdman* levels — ensures that although this is a film in which nothing happens apart from people talking to one another (it's a 'non-action' film, if you like) it never feels stodgy or inert.

The story is told through his key relationships, most notably with his head of marketing and 'work wife' Joanna Hoffman (Kate Winslet, with a coming-and-going East European accent), who appears joined to him at the hip and who spends less time on marketing than on undoing the personal harm Jobs might have done in relation to other key figures. Must I list them? I suppose I must, as they do keep turning up. So there's his Apple co-founder Steve Wozniak (Seth Rogen), programmer Andy Hertzfeld (Michael Stuhlbarg), one-time Apple CEO John Sculley (a delicious Jeff Daniels), the

mother of Jobs's daughter Chrisann (Katherine Waterston) and that daughter, Lisa, who is played by various actresses at various ages. The dialogue between them is pure Sorkin, in that it is marvellously clever, and cracks with the velocity of a screwball comedy, but I won't give any examples of any of the lines here, because you do need to hear them delivered. 'I sat in a garage and invented the future,' says Jobs, and now I have given you an example, while proving why I shouldn't have. Sounds nothing on the page.

I've no idea what's true here, or what isn't, what's been conflated, what's been omitted, but I would hope to come away with a proper sense of the man, and this is where the film trips up.

Beyond those rare moments of self-awareness, which, I have to say, felt rather contrived, Jobs's inner life is nowhere, and as for the 'genius', where is that? 'Musicians play their instruments. I play the orchestra,' he says of himself. But we never see him playing that orchestra; only ever see him as a driven perfectionist shouting at people. It also fails to deliver on what I call the 'great cook, terrible human being' problem, which is what Marcus Wareing said of Gordon Ramsay, and while I'm not comparing Ramsay to Jobs — Ramsay has not changed how we all live our lives, as far as I'm aware — it does raise the knotty issue of personality and its entanglement with talent. 'You can be gifted and decent,' Wozniak tells Jobs, but could Jobs have been? The filmmakers take no view on this, which leaves us all somewhat up in the air. And as for the ending, which wants to be redemptive, but merely comes over as syrupy and sentimental, it is so beneath all involved I never wish to think of it again. The journey, not the destination. It's only worth it for that.

# Theatre

## Double trouble

Lloyd Evans

### RoosevElvis

Royal Court, until 14 November

### As You Like It

Olivier, in rep until 5 March 2016

One of the challenges of art is to know the difference between innovation and error. I wonder sometimes if the Royal Court realises such a confusion can arise. Its new production, *RoosevElvis*, has been hailed as a thesaurus of fascinating novelties but to me it looks like a classic case of ineptitude posing as originality. It opens with two costumed women perched on bar stools speaking into microphones. One is dressed as Teddy Roosevelt in a cowboy hat and a handlebar moustache with a three-foot wingspan. The other is an Elvis impersonatrix wearing a lazy smirk and a black wig that sags forlornly over her ears, which seem to have turned pink with embarrassment. Introductions over, they reveal their true identities. The Elvis imitator is Ann, a sad, dim toiler at a factory that presses edible lard from slaughtered cows. Brenda, the Roosevelt admirer, is a spry, perky taxidermist. They're lovers,

*It's a mystery how this plotless goon-show wound up at the Royal Court*

we learn. No, hang on. They had a weekend tryst that they swiftly regretted. So this isn't a wild, doomed romance that might engage our hopes and fears, it's just a tepid fling gone cold before it starts.

They set off on a sightseeing tour of the Midwest whose meandering progress is illuminated for us with video footage. Mingling film and theatre seems like a good idea until you realise that the two genres keep tripping each other up. Theatre is now, film is then. Theatre is an act of hospitality whereas film is an act of reminiscence. Fusing the two is like running a bistro where the chef constantly interrupts service to show diners photographs of last night's dishes.

It soon emerges that Ann and Brenda's friendship is as durable as a marshmallow aqueduct. They have no shared interests, no grounds for war or reconciliation, no dramatic goals, no challenges to overcome. The same is true of their dead heroes whose differences are accentuated in two bizarrely polarised performances. Kirsten Sieh makes Roosevelt a bright, articulate and zingingly self-confident maverick while Libby King portrays Elvis as a drowsy, meat-gobbling pistol-fondler with an abnormal interest in policemen. After about 70 minutes, dopey Ann gets an idea. She will visit Graceland. Drab clips show

Rosalie Craig as Rosalind in 'As You Like It'



JOHN PERSSON

her dawdling wordlessly at the gates and adding an inky squiggle to the heavily defaced ramparts of the King's vacant castle. Then, ping! The lights go down and the play ends. It's a mystery how this plotless goon-show wound up at the Court. The references to buddy movies such as *Badlands* and *Thelma and Louise* suggest that it may be the debris of a film deal that fell through. If so, hoorah for Hollywood.

*As You Like It* is a play with two main attractions and a whole heap of drawbacks. The glib plot is artificial and convoluted. The stage is crowded with too many romances of an identical calibre. The reliance on cross-dressing as a source of mirth will turn even the keenest crowd into a posse of yawn-stiflers. And the characters are brittle creations who exist primarily to showcase the author's silvery tongue and lightening wit. On the plus side the role of Rosalind, the longest female part in Shakespeare, is attractive to thespians because she's a cool, eloquent, fearless beauty chased by a needy slab of male pulchritude. And Jaques's 'seven ages of man' speech is a lovely gem buried in a mountain of clever waffle. Paul Chahidi delivers the lines while pacing about the stage like a zonked tramp looking for his bum-bag. And

he pads out the lines with pauses, false starts and the odd quizzical frown flung into the middle distance. In other words he wants to persuade us he's Making It Up As He Goes Along, which is a peculiar way to tackle such a heavily anthologised gobbet.

The visuals are the strongest element in Polly Findlay's modernistic production. The opening scenes are located in an office that resembles a Forex trading floor. Stout machines, shiny tables and metal chairs are disposed across a dirt-concealing carpet with tutti-frutti colourings. As the location shifts from the court to the countryside the entire set is hoisted upwards on a crane which raises the furniture and then seems to get stuck. Chairs, tables and machines, strung together on cables, are left to dangle in great columns of pointy steel that reach almost to the floor of what has become the forest of Arden. It's a brilliantly weird device. And Findlay lays on a glorious comic gesture with a flock of sheep impersonated by the cast on all fours wearing cricket sweaters and going 'baa'. It sounds crass but it's done with a wonderful atmosphere of irony and tenderness. This text won't suit every stomach but if you can digest three hours of literary froth you'll find plenty to enjoy here.



*The spying game: Ben Whishaw as Danny in 'London Spy'*

## Television

### Spying and potting

James Delingpole

The main problem with being a TV critic, I've noticed over the years, is that you have to watch so much TV. It's not that I'm against it in principle: I like my evening's televisual soma as much as the next shattered wage slave with no life. But the reality is that you end up doing stuff like I found myself doing on this Monday night just gone — cringing at pert male arses heaving up and down in a sensitive gay love scene in some moody new BBC spy drama that is going to be occupying our screens for the next five weeks.

Why? I find straight sex enough of an embarrassment but watching two men going at it — even pretty ones like the stars of *London Spy* (BBC1, Mondays) Ben Whishaw and Edward Holcroft — really is an ordeal too far, especially when, as a viewer, you're clearly expected to find it all languorously romantic and lovely, whereas what you're actually thinking is: c'mon, you're a spy series, so let's have less shagging and more intrigue and killing.

Luckily, the first episode ended happily. The handsome but incredibly dull and taciturn lover ended up zipped into a bag, just

like that real spy who, it is now suspected, was bumped off by the Russians. How did he get there? Don't care, don't care! I refuse to endure any more of this brooding turgidity, a shame though it might be not to catch more of Jim Broadbent doing his twinkly turn as a wise old queen with an air of Smiley-esque inscrutability.

*The Great British Pottery Throw Down* (BBC2, Tuesdays) is proving to be a much

### *There aren't nearly enough dragons or tits or randomly horrible deaths*

safer bet. Clearly it wants to be the new *Bake Off* — and it is the new *Bake Off*, with Radio 2 DJ Sara Cox doing the jaunty banter à la Mel and Sue, and a couple of pot-heads (or whatever you call clay experts) standing in for Paul and Mary.

We knew we were in safe hands when, in the opening episode, the male judge — ceramics designer Keith Brymer Jones — broke down in tears at the raw emotional upsurge induced by the beauteous bowls created by a contestant he had imagined would be a no-hoper. The camera loved it and so did we at home. Creativity under pressure; arcane skills; endearing losers; dark-horse winners; competitive brutality sweetened with jokes. It's a formula that works because it's what we most want from

our TV: cosy, reassuring, familiar escapism.

I'd hoped to find a bit more of that in *The Last Kingdom* — the ongoing TV adaptation of Bernard Cornwell's Anglo-Saxon novels. But I fear it has had its wells poisoned by the conviction and shocking daring of *Game of Thrones*. You sense this timidity in the costume design, which is much more Merlin than echt 9th-century Wessex. Some prat, somewhere, clearly decided that, unless characters like the cute hero Uhtred (Alexander Dreymon) dressed like something from a boy band, the vital yoof demographic might find it all off-puttingly historical.

What works best is Cornwell's reimagined King Alfred as a wimpy, slightly prissy intellectual with a core of steel. I loved the scene where the horrid Vikings turn up to negotiations expecting to bully him into submission, only to find their table-upturning bluster overmatched by Alfred's cool intelligence. But the supporting characters — bitter, thwarted cousin, know-all monk, clever-clogs-cheeky-chappy servant — just look schematic and cardboard cut-out when set against the complexity of George R.R. Martin's. Plus there aren't nearly enough dragons or tits or randomly horrible deaths.

Finally, a late word of praise for *The Celts: Blood, Iron and Sacrifice* that was on BBC1 a few weeks ago and which you can

still find on iPlayer. It was a torrent of the usual BBC historical-documentary clichés: enthusiastic, nay passionate presenters, gender-balanced (Alice Roberts and Neil Oliver); 'we're going on a journey to discover...'; lashings of military re-enactment (by the ever-magnificent Mike Loades); breathtaking panoramas from helicopters; mysteries which were mysteries but which now may have been solved just milliseconds before the series came out thanks to an astonishing new discovery; orgasmic gasps at the beauty, power and majesty of artefacts in sundry museums; interviews with characterful foreign curators; and so on. Only this time they worked.

I gather from specialist websites that some of the history was a bit suspect: apparently, there's little if any evidence that the Iron Age salt-miners who spent their entire stunted lives toiling like Tolkien-esque dwarves beneath a mountain at Hallstatt in Austria were actual Celts. But the series was so generally entertaining I think we can allow it a little poetic licence, especially for the pleasure of watching Oliver sniffing some salt-preserved Iron Age poo and discovering that it still smells even to this day.

## Radio

### Bach breaking

Kate Chisholm

It's just not what you expect to hear on Radio 3 but I happened upon *Music Matters* on Saturday morning and after playing us a clip from the opening chorus of *St Matthew Passion* Tom Service pronounced, 'Bach is a tasteless and chaotic composer.' I felt as if my ears had been syringed.

Service was actually repeating what one of his guests, the Bach scholar John Butt, had just asserted, as if to verify his intention. Was he really saying that the composer formerly thought of as the epitome of balanced reflection and 'motivic organisation' would have sounded 'incompetent' to his audiences in 1727? Butt insisted, on the *Passion*, 'It's a complete mess.'

As I thought back on the music we had just heard, and with Butt's comments in mind, Bach's choruses did sound disorganised, the singers singing across and against each other, the styles mixed up from pastoral to fugue and back again. What Bach was doing, said Butt, was not breaking the rules so much as pushing the rules to the limit and thereby making everything sound different.

His conversation with Service was being broadcast live from Gateshead as part of this year's *Free Thinking* festival — concerts, talks and debates on the theme of rule-breaking. *Music Matters* was devoted to the question of what this might mean in musical terms. Cage's 4'33" or Offenbach's

can-can? Pierre Boulez's Second Piano Sonata or Strauss's *Four Last Songs* (both composed in 1948)? Which were the most revolutionary?

Butt was joined by the composer Kevin Volans, who questioned whether Stravinsky was really such a rule-breaker. His *Rite of Spring* still sounds amazingly fresh (and we heard a clip from it just to prove its shocking qualities) but it was Mussorgsky who really broke the rules, said Volans, because he was untrained. He wrote music outside the constraints imposed by education, and would, by the way, become a huge influence on Stravinsky.

Stevie Wishart, a composer herself who has done much to resurrect the music of the 12th-century Benedictine abbess Hildegard of Bingen, was taught by John Cage, who you might think encouraged her to break every rule (he wrote that four-and-a-half-

### You may never listen to Radio 4 in the same way again

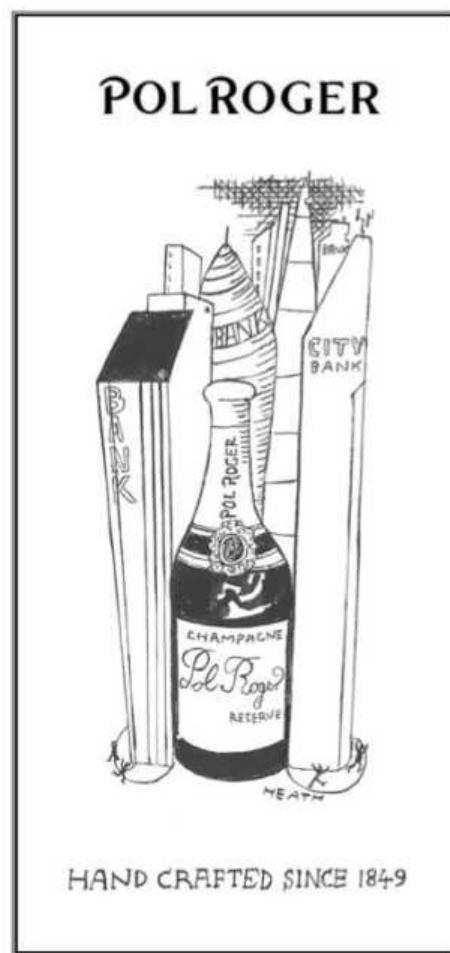
minute piece with not a note being played or sound made). On the contrary, she told us, he watched her struggle with notation, writing every note down, as any conventional tutor might do. Only when she heard Cage at a concert whacking chains on to the metal bars of the audience seating to create the musical sounds he wanted to hear did she realise that rule-breaking could take many different forms — as Nicholas Baragwanath confirmed. He told us that in his performance career as a pianist he used to insert improvised passages into classical works. 'No one ever noticed.'

Over on Radio 4, also on Saturday, the journalist and broadcaster Miranda Sawyer was throwing out the rules as regards radio with her new series on podcasting. You may never listen to Radio 4 in the same way again, she threatened on *In Pod We Trust* (produced by Jim Frank). 'You may never listen to Radio 4, full stop.'

There are now 100,000 English-language podcast 'feeds' worldwide, she told us, i.e. audio pieces available online that you can hear simply by clicking on to the arrow on the podcasters' websites or, if you decide to become a podcast subscriber, by receiving podcasts automatically on to your computer for listening as and when you choose. Last year, 165 million podcasts were downloaded from Radio 4 alone. Most podcasts, though, are made by complete amateurs. All you need is a smartphone and an internet connection and you, too, could go online with your thoughts, ideas, jokes, stories. They're usually short, 15–20 minutes at most, and tell stories that could only be told as audio. 'It's a strange, mesmerising, addictive world,' enthused Sawyer. Although she did also warn, 'It can also be rubbish.'

In this first of the series, Sawyer shared her favourite podcasts with the award-

winning Helen Zaltzman, who's been podcasting since 2007 (the first use of the word 'podcast' = iPod + broadcast was in 2004), and has now made 300-plus weekly episodes of *Answer Me This!* in which she and Olly Mann answer questions sent in by their listeners. She began podcasting as a way into working on radio but her podcasts became so popular she now has no need of 'conventional' work. Most of the podcasts are American, said Zaltzman, suggesting that perhaps this is because of the stranglehold of Radio 4 on the British market. Who would have time to venture elsewhere? I wonder, though, whether it's because podcasting is often about self-revelation in that West Coast way and is not very British. *Getting Better Acquainted*, for instance, happens to be made in London by Dave Pickering but is typical of many, designed by him to get to know his family and friends better. He persuaded his father to talk about how he lost his virginity in the war in an episode that was compelling but had me squirming. *Love + Radio*, though, offered an exquisite piece of storytelling. Rachel Prince was sent a brightly coloured vintage postcard from Coney Island, New York. It was dated January 15, 1938 and signed by 'M'. Who was that? We were only given a taster, which meant I had to go online and hear the rest.



# Secret ski resorts

By Ben Clatworthy

**S**kiing holidays have a problem. They've lost their sense of adventure. Yes, the first flurries of winter which arrived recently provoke excitement, and the lure of the mountains is still strong. What's lacking, however, is the sense of discovery, anticipation, and of reaching dizzying new heights.

This is no surprise, for the Alps have been entertaining winter tourists since 1864 when a group of Englishmen visited St Moritz 'out of season' as a bet. In its infancy, skiing was the preserve of the aristocracy, who holidayed only in the most chic resorts — the likes of Courchevel, Cortina and St Moritz — perilously hurling themselves down the mountains wearing plus-fours.

More recently, tour operators have gone to enormous lengths to broaden the sport's appeal and entice those who prefer flopping on sun loungers to frolicking in the cold. And it worked: by the 1960s a quarter of a million Brits were skiing every winter and purpose-built resorts were springing up everywhere. Over time, these expanded and connected up to other resorts, creating mega-ski areas spanning vast valleys.

Here your every whim is catered for, every turn signposted and every movement recorded; great, if you live in a cave for the rest of the year. But I don't, and I've had it with expansive, highfalutin resorts where



*Hallowed place: Alpine scenery near Grimentz*

you pay €30 for a burger yet are treated like muck. A few years ago, I discovered a Swiss secret. A hallowed place with powder on its doorstep, where some of the world's best freeride skiers hang out harmoniously alongside the locals. This is Grimentz, a stone's throw from Verbier, yet worlds away from the champagne-quaffing toffs. The only sounds in its narrow alleyways are the mooing of cows (cloistered for the winter in the village) and the odd clunk of ski boots.

Two seasons ago, a cable car linked the resort to nearby Zinal and you can now lap the area, skiing the Piste du Chamois, which descends from Zinal's highest point back to Grimentz, several times in a morning, skiing fresh lines every time.

I relished the same sense of adventure last season in Madesimo, an Italian resort

north of Lake Como. Here the slopes are less gnarly, the skiers drawn to easy-breezy blues and rolling reds. Experts can tackle the classic Canalone route, which begins at the top of a narrow, stomach-turning gully. But, as so often in Italy, the real treat is the food. Dinner at Dogana Vegia, a kitsch 340-year-old converted customs house at the edge of the village, is a must. Local specialities, such as cappellacci pasta with asparagus, are accompanied by a vast array of regional wines, climaxing with a gluggable (but headache-inducing) 16 per cent red.

There are hundreds of these gems in the Alps. Picturesque Valloire in France, for example, is overlooked by skiers who tear past the turn-off, eager for the Three Valleys, while Grossglockner in Austria's East Tirol has a modern ski area that was deserted when I visited. I realise now that I'd become blinkered: obsessing over the kilometres of slopes, stars tacked on to the side of hotels and the number of après-ski bars. Where's the fun in that? The mountains offer the perfect escape from reality to a white world where time stands still. But you won't find that in an alpine metropolis. So eschew the likes of Verbier, with its honking hoorays, Courchevel with its fur-clad Russians, and Val d'Isère's exorbitant Dom Pérignon. You'll be better off a few miles up the road.

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'Did the tiny David Cameron come here, fill his tuck box, rearrange his tiny face into a tiny smile?'

— Tanya Gold, p86

# LIFE

## High life

Taki



Those who forget the pasta are condemned to reheat it, tweeted Jon Ronson, a man I'd never heard of until his quip about spaghetti. I read about the tweet in a newspaper, as I've never used social media — Twitter, Facebook, Instagram — and hope that I never will. Why would I, unless I wanted to make trouble for myself? Not everyone needs to know what you're doing all of the time. Or any of the time, for that matter.

They say that the most destructive four-letter word in the digital domain is 'send'. (Just as the scariest three words in American literature are Joyce Carol Oates.) I recently received an email from a young woman I've occasionally taken out to dinner calling me all sorts of names. According to her, I had propositioned her and offered her money. By email, that is. That, I can guarantee you, I had not done, but I didn't bother to reply as I hadn't emailed her in the first place. The only thing I know how to do is to send and receive emails. I have no way of knowing if someone had used my name to proposition the young woman, or if one can pretend to be someone else while emailing. And I don't care to find out.

And while I'm at it, I have yet to see a single person reading a newspaper — God forbid a book — as I walk the streets of New York on the Upper East Side every day. But what I have seen are people punching away at those ghastly contraptions inside Shakespeare & Co, a bookstore I have morning coffee in from time to time. Just think of it: people use those idiotic machines inside a place that sells books. It's a bit like masturbating inside a whorehouse.

What kind of person needs to tell another what he or she is thinking all of the time? An idiot, that's for sure. Are more and more people becoming idiotic? Definitely. The other thing I've noticed, although it's been around for some time, is the absence of civility in sport. I am referring to the self-aggrandisement that has overwhelmed almost all sport. I have a friend who shall remain nameless

for his own protection. He is the first person you see after a match with a microphone interviewing winners and losers. He probably knows more athletes than anyone else on earth, and this is what he recently told me. The only two that have ever shown any interest in him and his family by inquiring about their whereabouts and the state of their health are Roger Federer and Usain Bolt. I was not surprised at the mention of the former, but I admit I was amazed when he mentioned the Jamaican sprinter. Good for him. The fastest man on earth takes the time for the formalities that make human beings different from the animals we resemble most of the time. My friend told me that he once had a terrible cold in Beijing and tried to keep as far away as possible from those he was interviewing in order for them not to catch it. Not a single one noticed. His cold, that is. 'It's all me, me, me,' said my friend.

Just see for yourselves the next time some jock is being interviewed. They will bang their chest with their fist and use the word 'I' while glaring at the camera. I suppose this comes from the coaches — the solipsism, I mean. I'll never forget the first time I heard this drivel at Wimbledon. I was there as a spectator and an American male player had lost a match. A man I presumed was his coach — unheard of back then — was holding his head with both hands and repeating the phrase, 'You're strong, you're strong, you're unbeaten,' and other such drivel. This was back in the Seventies. Now they all have coaches and at all levels. Instilling confidence is the sine qua non of coaching, hence the solipsism and the me, me, me syndrome. Oh, for the good old days when Lew Hoad and Ken Rosewall battled on Centre Court without once looking up at the boxes and punching their chests.

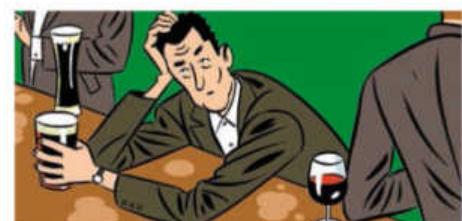
I could go on and on, but it would be use-

less. One cannot bring back the past, and one shouldn't try. Manners have changed. They no longer exist. Countries such as Britain and the United States have media that pollute the culture like never before. A great behemoth of a man, an ex-basketball star, snorts cocaine, takes herbal Viagra and drinks himself into a stupor before falling into a coma inside a whorehouse. An ugly estranged wife with a propensity for publicity rushes to his side in a Las Vegas hospital. It becomes a stop-the-presses moment. An anxious Anglo-Saxon world waits with baited breath. Actually, I was hoping that a double suicide would rid us of that troublesome couple, but no such luck.

Never mind. Life is still pretty good. Next week I shall be a film star once again. I am shooting a movie with, you guessed it, Alec Baldwin and Demi Moore directed by Michael Mailer. Two guesses why I got the part?

## Low life

Jeremy Clarke



My sister has a new man in her life: Henry, 60. He lives in a gay hotel. Or rather, it was a gay hotel in the era when homosexuality was illegal; now the Victorian seaside villa is empty save for my sister's new boyfriend, my sister sometimes, and a transvestite maid called Rita. Sometimes he is a porter called Stan. One never knows from day to day whether he is going to appear as a male or a female, and one has to be careful not to make any rash assumptions because he becomes apoplectic if one addresses him as Stan when he is Rita, for example. But when he is Rita, says my sister, it is usually blindingly obvious, because he wears a micro-skirt, black net stockings and suspenders.

I didn't get to meet my sister's new boyfriend immediately. For about a month I only heard her talking about him. Clearly, she was very taken with the guy because she thinned down, glammed up, and her mood switched somewhat startlingly from depression to elation. She was a different person.



'You need to have a word with your tattooist.'

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All she wanted to do was sing Henry's praises. He was her sun, moon and stars. Oh, I'd like him, she said. Such an interesting, well-travelled guy and such fun. He has lived abroad most of his life: Peru, Laos, Mexico, Colombia, Thailand. And these are just his favourites. Name a country — any country — and he's been there. Because he infringed the law in some unspecified but perhaps easily guessable way, he is no longer allowed into the United States. He returned to the UK two years ago to punt the hotel, which he inherited from his father. This is proving more difficult than he imagined. He is missing abroad and restless, she said. But he really wants to meet you.

'But he really wants to meet you.' The dreaded, inevitable phrase. I dread it because my sister must big me up out of all proportion to the reality. Introductions to her new boyfriends always smack uncomfortably of diplomatic choreography; of credentials humbly presented by the dashing envoy of a rising power to an indifferent mandarin official of a great one. My sister ushers them into my presence, introduces them and discreetly withdraws, leaving us to talk man to man. Now an old hand at these

*'I'm a racist. My sister's a racist.  
We're all racists here.'*

occasions, I seize the opportunity to voice the most extreme opinions, either of the left or of the right, that I can think of.

When the day came, she wheeled a chap into the kitchen who looked how the Seventies glam rocker Marc Bolan might have looked had he survived the car crash and made it to 60. Big, curly, floppy hair, and the air of the laid-back veteran rock star reduced to Buddhism, unsure of which day of the week it is. For the occasion, he was prinked up in a broad country-check tweed jacket, trousers so tight you could see whether or not he was circumcised and pointy, shiny, caramel-coloured dress shoes. 'Jeremy: Henry,' said my sister. Then she left us to it.

I offered tea. Henry had brought his own refreshment. He produced a bottle of red wine, ripped off the screw top like a man possessed, tipped out a glassful of wine and tossed back half of it. 'I've got to sit down,' he said, falling backwards into a chair at the kitchen table. I joined him, liking him straight away. The face was kindly, resigned and crimson. 'So where next, Henry?' I said. 'Somewhere where there's opium,' he said dejectedly. 'I love opium but I can't get it around here. Where can I go where there's opium?' 'India?' I ventured. He rebuffed the idea of going to India by screwing up his face as against driving sleet. We sat silently for a moment, thinking about where was best to go for opium. Suddenly he said, 'Mexico!' At the thought of Mexico his sun came out. 'Man, I love Mexico. I love everything about it. I lived there. Have you ever been to Mex-

ico?' I shook my head decisively. 'Oh man,' he implored. 'You must go.'

Then he made a statement about the infinite possibilities of Mexico that might possibly be interpreted by a stickler for that kind of thing as a racist statement, and he immediately retracted it and apologised. I looked at him levelly. He held my eyes guiltily. I asked him why he was apologising. 'Well, I wouldn't want anyone to think I was a closet racist,' he said. I looked at him in astonishment. 'What's wrong with being a racist?' I said. He thought for a while, then he said, 'Well, I don't feel superior to anyone — particularly.' 'Don't you worry, old son,' I said, opening my arms to welcome him to the family. 'I'm a racist. My sister's a racist. We're all racists here. You carry on and be as racist as you like.'

## Real life

### Melissa Kite



By the time you read this I will have delivered my long-awaited speech to the World Horse Welfare annual conference in the presence of the Princess Royal. I say 'long awaited' not because I have some inflated sense of how important I am. But because I have been working myself into a right old lather about it.

I was perfectly fine until the organisers sent me a few emails with useful information about the conference themes and asked me out for a coffee to discuss my speech.

'Agh!' I thought. 'Why are they asking me what I'm going to say? I have no idea what I am going to say. But more to the point, why do they feel they need to ask me?'

In the bowels of the WHW headquarters, I became convinced, there were top people holding high-level discussions involving panic-stricken remarks along the lines of: 'What have you booked her for, you idiot? Did you not read what she's been writing about the RSPCA?

'We're going to have our conference ruined by a paranoid loony spouting conspiracy theories about secret horse-culling — and in front of Princess Anne!'

A few months ago, you see, I was involved in a story revealing that the RSPCA had loaded a dozen horses on to a lorry, driven them to a location many miles away and shot them. They then billed for thousands of pounds for looking after them as if they were alive, though they later withdrew the claim blaming an administrative error.

I duly rang lots of leading horse experts

for comment, expecting universal outrage, but the response of the official bodies was unanimous: 'Nothing to see here! Nothing happening at all!'

The off-the-record response of one veterinary official to the revelation that vets had been billing for phantom treatments given to some of the dead horses was particularly instructive: 'Well, it's only a couple of wormers.' The reaction was eerily of a piece no matter which equine authority I asked: 'Move along, please, crazy conspiracy woman! You're making a fool of yourself!'

So you will forgive me if I have started to assume that the word on the street is that I sit huddled in a cold, damp flat wearing grubby mittens and a beanie hat, staring wild-eyed at newspaper clippings pinned to every inch of the walls, running to the windows every now and then to peer through the closed blinds to see whether a mysterious dark van has appeared outside that may contain people sent to deal with me. (This is almost absolutely true, by the way.)

It was, I decided, most unfortunate for the WHW to have already invited me into their august midst by the time I went public with my wild notions.

Naturally, once they realised what they had done, the emails started to ping in asking me what I was going to say. Of course they were having second thoughts about booking me. Who wouldn't?

The problem was, every time they asked me what I was planning to say, I couldn't tell them. Because I had no idea. I'm not that organised. I'm not only a paranoid conspiracy theorist, I'm menopausal. But the more I told them I didn't know, the more worried they seemed to become. Of course they did.

And then I went down with flu and had to cancel the meeting they arranged to discuss my speech. At which point they sent me an email in which they sounded so worried they were ready to come round to my house and sit at my bedside and help me write my speech in between vapour rubs. But I couldn't let them do that because then they would see the newspaper clippings about dead horses all over the walls.

A few days before the speech, however, I felt so sorry for them I sent an email offering to stand aside in favour of another speaker. But this was rejected. The programmes had been printed.

So we are where we are and my speech is tomorrow and I need to get to grips with it. The theme of the conference is: are traditional methods of horse management best? I really ought to just say yes, and leave it at that. But here are some points that we will be discussing in detail: how often ought we to be worming? (Don't mention the dead horses given wormers . . . don't mention the . . .) Can laminitis happen all year round? (Don't mention the dead horses . . . don't mention . . .) Should we allow a horse to rest before and after it has travelled? Gosh, I

don't know, how about we ask the RSPCA? I know they sometimes 'rest' a horse indefinitely after it has travelled, so I'm sure they could give us some tips.

Stop it! I must get a grip! I must not lose concentration and suddenly slip into spouting the truth. No good will come of it.

## Long life

Alexander Chancellor



It is hardly uncommon for politicians to lie, especially when their careers are threatened by a sexual transgression — John Pro-fumo about Christine Keeler, for example, and Bill Clinton on not having had 'sexual relations with that woman, Miss Lewinsky'. But there is a particular kind of distortion of the truth that is rare over here but almost routine among American presidential candidates; and this is the way they embellish their personal histories to maximise their

appeal to voters. It's been going on for ages among candidates of both main parties, but presently most scrutiny is directed at Ben Carson, the retired neurosurgeon and Seventh-day Adventist — denier of global warming, Darwinism and most other fashionable creeds — who has surprisingly jumped in the polls to the front of the Republican field.

Carson's story is one of rags to riches in which a violent temper as a boy was cured by study of the Bible. But none of his school contemporaries remember this violence, especially an incident in which he says he tried to stab a young friend. They all remember him as a peaceful young chap. His life, as described in campaign speeches, is more turbulent than anyone else can recall, and his boasted achievements and triumphs in adversity have proven impossible to verify. In particular, his claim to have been offered a scholarship to the United States Military Academy at West Point has been proven unfounded.

Then there is Ted Cruz, the Hispanic senator from Texas and another Republican candidate, whose campaign speeches have been much enriched by his vivid descriptions of the exploits of his Cuban-born father — now 76 and a US citizen — during the Castro revolution in the 1950s against the dictator, Fulgencio Batista. These por-

tray his father, Rafael Cruz, as a rebel leader, bomb-thrower, gun-runner and so on, whereas diligent research by the American media has found little evidence of this. His former Cuban comrades and friends describe him as little more than a rebellious teenager who wrote on walls and marched in the streets.

Donald Trump, whose position at the top of the polls was — to his fury — usurped by Carson, is the author of countless questionable statements, but the main one to have been challenged is the extent of the wealth of which he constantly boasts. There is no question that he is extremely rich, but he talks about being worth more than ten billion dollars whereas Bloomberg, for example, says about three billion. This might not seem to matter very much, but Trump rests his case for election on his unique skills as a deal-maker that have made him, in his view, quite exceptionally rich.

Even Hillary Clinton, the favourite for the Democratic nomination, can be eco-

*Plagiarism is regarded in America as an unpardonable offence; inventing a life story isn't*

nomical with the truth. During her last bid for the presidency, in which she was beaten by Barack Obama, she was forced to retract a claim that in 1996, as First Lady, she had landed at an airport in Bosnia under sniper fire. 'There was supposed to be some kind of a greeting ceremony at the airport, but instead we just ran with our heads down to get into the vehicles to get to our base,' she said. A video, however, showed her ambling with her daughter Chelsea across the airport tarmac, smiling and greeting well-wishers. There had been no sniper fire. In another perplexing statement, Hillary said she had been named after Sir Edmund Hillary, the New Zealand mountaineer who conquered Everest, whereas in fact she was already nearly six years old when Sir Edmund reached the summit in 1953.

You might expect presidential candidates to be more careful after what happened to Vice-President Joe Biden in 1988. He was then seeking the Democratic nomination but was forced to withdraw from the race after he made a speech about his rise from humble roots to become the first member of his family ever to attend college. But his fall from grace was not due to the fact that this statement wasn't true, which it wasn't, but because his remarks had been lifted almost verbatim from a campaign speech in Britain by Neil Kinnock when he was leader of the Labour party. Biden even included Kinnock's statement that his ancestors were coal miners, which wasn't true of Biden either, though it was of Kinnock. Plagiarism is regarded in America as an unpardonable offence; inventing a life story isn't. The people just love fairy tales.

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### Triumphant Twelve

#### Robin Oakley

Three personalities dominated the Flat season: Gosden, Dettori and Golden Horn. Victories for the trio in the Derby, the Irish Champion Stakes and the Prix de l'Arc de Triomphe ensured that John Gosden, a true ambassador for the sport, once again won the trainers' championship, a title determined by the value of victories won. Frankie Dettori was not champion jockey and never again will be: that title (who needs logic in racing?) is determined by the number of winners ridden and deservedly went to the hardworking Brazilian Silvestre de Sousa. What Dettori did was to demonstrate that he is still as good as anybody when it comes to the flair, the judgment and the sheer balls needed on the big occasions. He had a point to make after being dropped by Sheikh Mohammed's Godolphin operation in 2013 and temporarily running off the rails, and he has made it. Ironically, de Sousa too had been dropped from the Godolphin team at the end of last season.

Other riders have discovered that accepting retainers can be a mixed blessing and that losing them is not necessarily a disaster: young Harry Bentley, dropped by the Qatari team as its No. 2 rider at the end of last season, showed his character by booting home winners for William Haggas, Hugo Palmer, Ralph Beckett, Henry Candy and others and moving significantly up the table.

Andrea Atzeni decided at the end of the year to jump ship as the Qatari No. 1 while the team's replacement for Bentley, Oisin Murphy, has struggled to retain the prominence he enjoyed the previous year when winning the apprentice title with Andrew Balding. Retained riders may enjoy a financial cushion but they have to go where they are told and don't always find themselves at the big meetings where they can pick up eye-catching rides.

It has been a good year for those of you brave enough to invest in our Twelve to Follow, now moving into its 21st year. The Flat twelve ran on 42 occasions and knocked up ten victories between them. Remarkably, had you invested a tenner on each occasion you would now be sitting on a profit of £328. Our best contributor was Robert Cowell's sprinter Goldream, who followed up his 20-1 victory in the Group One King's Stand Stakes at Ascot with a 15-2 triumph in the Prix de l'Abbaye at Longchamp. David O'Meara's Algar Lad scored a handy 14-1 victory at York and Denis Coakley's Miss Marjurie won at 7-1 at Haydock. Mecca's Angel was a Group One winner too in the Nunthorpe at 15-2 having already won at 4-1. If only she had had the soft going she needs and run more often in the top sprints. Academy

House, Elm Park, Forgotten Rules and Igider also contributed to our pot while our trainer to follow, Hugo Palmer, did us proud with a string of Group victories and a Classic.

So where can we look for some winners over jumps? Among the novice hurdlers David Pipe's Champers On Ice looks hot but is unlikely to be available at a working man's price so let us go for Neil Mulholland's Shantou Village, victor of a Carlisle contest by 19 lengths, Philip Hobbs's Perform, an Aintree winner, and Warren Greatrex's Duke des Champs.

My long-term hopes for the Grand National are Saint Are, Broadway Buffalo and The Druid's Nephew but I won't include them because National preparations don't always give good punting opportunities.

Chasers who should give us rewards through the season are David Pipe's Vieux Lion Rouge, Tom George's God's Own, Paul Nicholls's Ptit Zig and Tom Symonds's Kaki De La Pree. Among the novices Harry Fry's Fletcher's Flyer and Dan Skelton's Value At Risk should prove worth following.

To them we must add the Evan Williams-trained Padge. Ridden by the ever-dependable Paul Moloney in a truly testing 2m 3f race at Ascot recently, in which Paul Nicholls's Anatol set a scorching pace, Padge came to the lead at the last and held on despite veering left and precipitating a stewards' inquiry. When I remarked to Evan afterwards that he'd been quite pricey at £160,000 he smiled and said, 'One day you'll be telling me that was a bargain.' Padge, he said, has the inestimable benefit of patient owners who have had to wait for Padge's mind to catch up with his impressive engine. He's been around a long time now but I make Evan my trainer to watch this season. He usually finds a good one for the National and he never hypes his horses. The jockey to watch? Nico de Boinville, emerging as Nicky Henderson's top choice.

For the mares' races Oliver Sherwood is sweet on his Legend Lady, a narrow choice over Warren Greatrex's Hannah's Princess, and the final place in the Twelve goes to a slightly more uncertain prospect, Dan Skelton's Robin of Locksley. I watched him at Cheltenham behind the impressive Penglai Pavilion and I am sure that if they can stop him pulling his jockey's arms out he is bound to win races.



## Bridge

### Janet de Botton

The EBU's Premier League takes place over three weekends and decides who will represent England in next year's Camrose (home nations) Trophy. My team were leading after both the first and second weekends and I was all geared up for the coveted England shirt that says you are a bridge god and play for your country. Sadly, I won't have to worry about whether they get my size right as we had a dreadful last two days and came absolutely nowhere! The event was won by David Mossop's squad, which contains one of the nicest (and best) pairs on the circuit — Colin Simpson and David Price.

David gave his team a massive boost by bringing home this tricky 6NT.

**Dealer South**

**E/W vulnerable**

♠ 6 4	♠ 10 9 8 7 5
♥ AQ 7 2	♥ K 4 3
♦ J 8 7 3	♦ Q 6 4 2
♣ K 9 5	♣ J
♠ 3	♠ AK Q J 2
♥ J 9 6 5	♥ 10 8
♦ 10 9	♦ AK 5
♣ 10 8 7 6 3 2	♣ AQ 4

Contract: 6NT by South

West led a middle Club which David won in hand and tried a Diamond to the Jack and Queen. East thought for a minute or two, and returned a Spade. Two rounds of those brought the unwelcome news, but when the ♦10 fell under the Ace, some parity was restored, and dummy's ♦8 was good. With 11 tricks in sight, declarer had the option of taking the Heart finesse or squeezing East in the majors.

David went to dummy with the King of Clubs to cash the good Diamond, and returned to hand with the last Club. On this trick East was squeezed, but smoothly bared his King of Hearts, as you would expect in an event like this. David was not fooled, however, and after cashing his remaining high Spades, he coolly played a Heart to the Ace for a spectacular 990.

How did he get it right? Well, table presence plays a huge part here. When East was on lead, he took quite some time to plan his defence. This makes it more likely that he is looking at the King of Hearts, and is planning his sequence of discards. It's a tiny hint, but sometimes that's all you've got.

# Chess

## Sporting chance

### Raymond Keene

I was not quite sure whether to be annoyed or relieved about the recent High Court decision not to recognise bridge as a sport. On the one hand, it's a comfort to know that there is now little danger of British bridge and, *pari passu*, chess being classified alongside activities that feature perspiring individuals running around in underwear. Chess should, in my opinion, be dignified by elegant surroundings, with the players in formal attire, as in the fictional sequence of the James Bond movie *From Russia with Love*, or the encounters between Nigel Short and Garry Kasparov that were screened by Channel 4 in 1987.

However, with established chess championships going back for well over 100 years, competitions carried out under strict conditions, a stratified title system, millions in prizes for world matches, and recognition by the International Olympic Committee, I think high-level competitive chess should certainly be granted the status of a mind sport. Indeed, it is a sport where male and female, young and old, even the deaf, blind and physically disabled can compete with equal prospects.

What's more, chess is recognised as a sport in all the former eastern bloc countries, as well as in China and almost all of the European Union, the exceptions being the UK, the Republic of Ireland, Belgium and Sweden. Sweden plans to rectify this next year. And Russia is trying to have chess included in the Winter Olympics, while chess and bridge have been invited to apply for inclusion in the 2020 Tokyo Olympics.

This week's game was the real-life model for the combination in the fictional game between Kronsteen and McAdams from the film *From Russia with Love*. Notes are based on those from *Spassky Move by Move* by Zenon Franco (Everyman Chess).

**Spassky-Bronstein:** Leningrad 1960; King's Gambit

**1 e4 e5 2 f4 exf4 3 Nf3 d5 4 exd5 Bd6**  
**5 Nc3 Ne7 6 d4 0-0 7 Bd3 Nd7 8 0-0 h6**  
**9 Ne4** White sacrifices his d5-pawn in order to

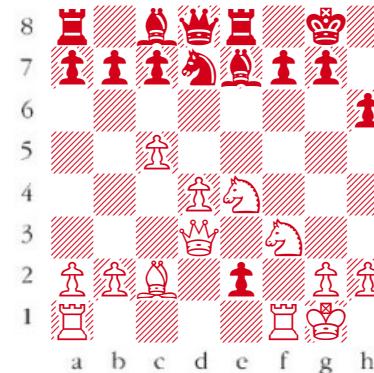
### PUZZLE NO. 387

White to play. This position is a variation from A.Muzichuk-Dzagnidze, Monaco 2015. How can White finish off with a classic combination? Answers to me at The Spectator by Tuesday 17 November or via email to [victoria@spectator.co.uk](mailto:victoria@spectator.co.uk) or by fax on 020 7681 3773. The winner will be the first correct answer out of a hat, and each week there is a prize of £20. Please include a postal address and allow six weeks for prize delivery.

**Last week's solution** 1 d6+

**Last week's winner** Luke Brown, Gosforth, Newcastle upon Tyne

Diagram 1



launch a strong offensive. **9 ... Nxd5 10 c4 Ne3 11 Bxe3 fxe3 12 c5 Be7 13 Bc2**

Spassky wrote that this was the most difficult move of the game. It is sharper than 13 Qe2 Nf6 14 Qxe3 Be6, which leads to a rather unclear position. **13 ... Re8 14 Qd3 e2** (see diagram 1) **15 Nd6!!** Objectively this is not the best continuation but it is certainly one of the most spectacular moves in the history of chess, and also one of the most surprising decisions, because the quiet 15 Rf2! (or even 15 Qxe2) would have given White the advantage.

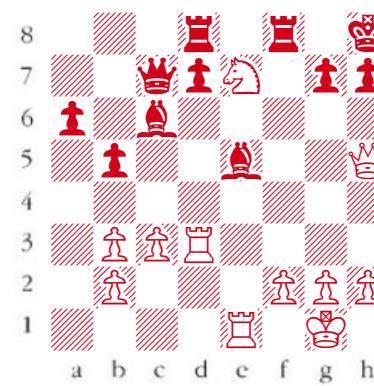
**15 ... Nf8** Black's had to try the calm 15 ... exf1Q+ 16 Rxf1 Bxd6 17 Qh7+ Kf8 18 exd6 cxd6 19 Qh8+ Ke7 20 Re1+ Ne5! 21 Qxg7 Rg8! 22 Qxh6 Qb6! 23 Kh1 Be6 24 dx5 with an unclear position. **16 Nxsf7 exf1Q+ 17 Rxf1** Despite the fact that Black is a rook ahead and has several pieces close to his king, he cannot defend against White's domination of the light-squares. If 17 ... Qd5 18 Bb3 Qxf7 19 Bxf7+ Kxf7 20 Qc4+ Kg6 21 Qg8 Bf6 22 Nh4+ Bxh4 23 Qf7+ Kh7 24 Qxe8 and wins. Finally 17 ... Kxf7 loses to 18 Ne5+ Kg8 19 Qh7+ Nxf7 20 Bb3+ Kh8 21 Ng6++. **17 ... Bf5 18 Qxf5**

With two pawns for the exchange and an attack on the king, the result is no longer in doubt.

**18 ... Qd7 19 Qf4 Bf6 20 N3e5 Qe7 21 Bb3 Bxe5 22 Nxe5+ Kh7 23 Qe4+**

**Black resigns**

This week's puzzle is from the women's grand prix in Monaco, won by Hou Yifan.



# Competition

## Martian poetry

### Lucy Vickery

In Competition No. 2923 you were invited to describe an everyday object, in verse, from the point of view of a Martian.

James Fenton coined the term Martian to describe the work of poets such as Craig Raine and Christopher Reid, whose poems cast familiar objects in an unfamiliar light. In his 1979 poem 'A Martian Sends a Postcard Home' Raine describes books, or 'caxtons' as he calls them, as 'mechanical birds with many wings/ and some are treasured for their markings —/ they cause the eyes to melt/ or the body to shriek without pain...'

This was a challenging comp. Children are well suited to writing Martian but it's trickier for adults with their more fully formed view of the world. Though Michael Seese, Mark Shelton and Michael Spencer did well and deserve honourable mentions, the entries printed below came closest to what I was looking for. They earn their authors £25 each. Bill Greenwell takes the bonus fiver.

Lately, it has been forced  
to fit in. It hides in plain view,

shameless, bright on the outside.  
After a meal, it eats itself

in spasms, helped by its congregants,  
who drum silver tattoos

on dirtied porcelain, filling its maw.  
When no one is looking,

it passes coded messages  
over the airwaves to the dog, who sniffs

at its pretension, wrestling it down.  
Sometimes it hoards junk:

it takes in what no one has franked,  
and keeps it, unopened,

before its dark and sleazy uterus  
is skinned and evicted.

*Bill Greenwell*

They are ubiquitous, concealed  
In every home and office block;  
An object, when one stands revealed,  
Whose substance is like polished rock.  
A snail's shell is its shape, turned up,  
Much magnified in bulk and size;  
And in its sloping, hollowed cup  
A level pool of water lies.  
This font, it seems, they venerate,  
And worship often in its shrine,  
Alone and in a secret state  
Within the small and locked confine.  
Their offerings they make unseen,  
The water moved with drops or drill;  
Then use a purgative machine  
To leave the water clear and still.  
*W.J. Webster*

They stand alone, dressed all in red,  
With markings on their front and head.  
Each mouth perpetually gapes  
For brown and white nutritious shapes.  
Their owners feed them every day,  
But, when they finish, walk away.  
Sometimes their chests are opened wide  
By surgeons, who then grope inside.  
This helps these static pets excrete  
The residues of what they eat.  
*Jerome Bettis*

I see a smoothly fashioned void,  
a frustum of paraboloid,  
that in its simple geometry  
displays a perfect symmetry  
but for a small protuberance  
not fabricated to enhance,  
accommodating human grips,  
enabling passage to the lips.  
The void is filled with elements  
whose flavoured texture and whose scents  
when tipped into the human jaws  
inspire pleasure and applause.  
This solid with its hollow core,  
a thing of clay, and nothing more,  
gives humankind its will to be.  
For them it is their cup of tea.  
*Frank McDonald*

An oblong with a polished face  
It's carried round from place to place  
In a pocket, bag, or hand,  
And sometimes humans simply stand  
And gaze at it, as if to see  
Their future in its mystery.  
Sometimes they poke its face as if  
To wake it up, but hard and stiff  
It lies inanimate till stirred  
When it will chirrup like a bird  
Or sing a song and to its cry  
Its human owner then will fly  
To shut it up, or full of fear  
Clasp it tightly to an ear  
And talk out loud. But it must be fed  
By plug or mat, or it will be dead.  
*Katie Mallett*

The people walk about and talk to God  
With boxes to their ears. It's very odd.  
They tell him what they will and what they won't.  
You think he'd know but obviously he don't.

They sit and put the boxes on their laps  
And gaze and gaze. What do they see? Perhaps  
It is their souls they contemplate. And what  
They see is something they had rather not.

The God who lives within the box is small  
And sad, no majesty and power at all.  
But withered, suited to their misery.  
He is not anything a God should be.

Good God, is that time? Must fly, they say,  
And shut him up to squirrel him away.  
But still he chirrups every now and then,  
Hoping that they will pick him up again.  
*John Whitworth*

#### NO. 2926: RAILWAY RHYTHMS

Auden wrote a poem about the mail train to Scotland, so let's have one about HS2. Please email entries of up to 16 lines to [lucy@spectator.co.uk](mailto:lucy@spectator.co.uk) by midday on 25 November.

## Crossword

### 2237: Experimental by Lavatch

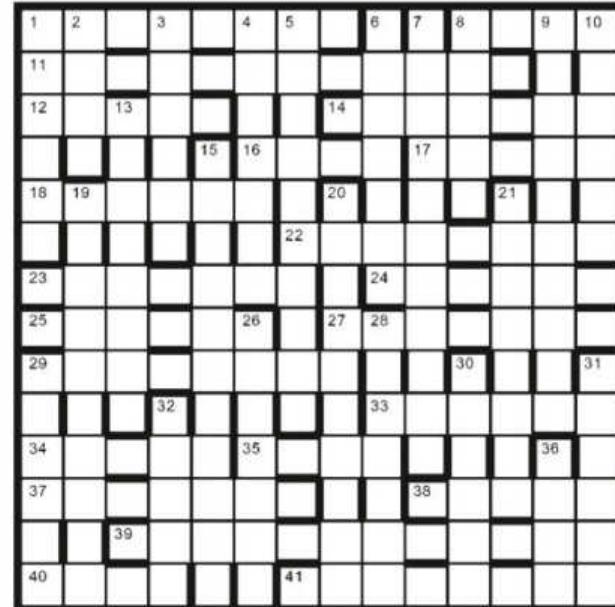
One unclued light is a publication (two words). The others are relevant figures (all in *Chambers*) who appear in a form suggested by the publication's title.

#### Across

- 1 Maybe camping, emptied lavatory diligently (8)
- 8 Heartlessly shakes young animals (4)
- 12 Earl leaves part of UK, touring king's avenues (5)
- 16 Bed of rock's silicon lines (4)
- 17 Return dirty old dishes (5)
- 18 Letter by doctor, one giving lozenges (6)
- 24 Irritation on street a pain when running (6)
- 25 Hesitation, beset by dire last warnings (6)
- 27 I must enter large gallery with openings (7)
- 29 Implements silent reforms in country (8)
- 33 A fruit tree cut back in nettles (6)
- 35 Turn over smooth seaweed (4)
- 39 One with grid completed beginning to yawn unappreciatively (12)
- 40 Vessel's breaking point over here! (4)
- 41 Church's ringers in filthy places (8)
- 7 Libertine covered by PM — queen's people providing spin? (11)
- 8 Song from soprano kept in hand, partly (5)
- 9 Cope with client getting rough and greedy (10)
- 10 Discovers county's hidden unknown section (6)
- 13 Investigations seek criminal in bathrooms (8, hyphenated)
- 15 Pound shelf, gripping round hammer (11, hyphenated)
- 19 Poorly PM welcomes Liberal? Not so much (10)
- 20 Numberless bitterns, or a cuckoo with two beaks (10)
- 21 Quickly eating dictator's nutritive substance (8, two words)
- 26 Soldiers following board with a foreign address (7)
- 29 Open University partners getting better (6)
- 30 Can winning excite? (6, two words)
- 31 Austen hero's measures of permeability (6)
- 32 Scots tax small, temporary dwelling (5)
- 36 Strike, holding large part of dagger (4)

#### Down

- 2 American interrupts writer turning tide (4)
- 3 Northerner second behind European runner (6)
- 4 Tighter clues? That is right (7)
- 5 Girl following soldiers gets bacterium (10)
- 6 Shoots son lost at sea (7)
- 30 Can winning excite? (6, two words)
- 31 Austen hero's measures of permeability (6)
- 32 Scots tax small, temporary dwelling (5)
- 36 Strike, holding large part of dagger (4)



A first prize of £30 for the first correct solution opened on 30 November. There are two runners-up prizes of £20. (UK solvers can choose to receive the latest edition of the Chambers Dictionary instead of cash—ring the word 'Dictionary'.) Entries to: Crossword 2237, The Spectator, 22 Old Queen Street, London SW1H 9HP. Please allow six weeks for prize delivery.

**Name** .....

**Address** .....

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# Status Anxiety

## A new addition to the Young household

Toby Young

I'm pleased to announce an addition to the Young household — a ten-week-old Vizsla. For those unfamiliar with this particular breed of dog, they are Hungarian in origin and when fully grown are about the same size as a lab. They make good bird dogs — they're excellent retrievers — but can also double up as household pets. We've named him Leo on account of his leonine colouring.

Caroline says it's like having a new baby, save for the fact that she isn't breastfeeding him, and that's not a joke. For one thing, I had no choice in the matter, just as I wasn't consulted on the four occasions she decided to get pregnant. She drove up to Wales one morning to 'look at' some Vizsla puppies and returned in the evening with Leo under her jacket.

Having a dog is also a big expense. I was dimly aware that he would cost the best part of £1,000, but had no idea there were so many extras. Not just the food — and the meat content of his diet is already higher than mine — but all the accessories, including a 'den', a winter jacket and a range of toys. Then there's the Kennel Club health insurance, which is more than £600 a year. I'm amazed that no politician has run on a platform of setting up an NHS for dogs. I'd vote for him.



*I have been entertaining the fantasy that having a dog will teach my children to be more responsible*

In some respects, it's actually harder work than having a baby because you can't put a nappy on a pup. At ten weeks, his urinary system resembles that of a rat in that he produces a constant trickle of wee wherever he goes. We've confined him to the kitchen, which would make our lives easier were it not for the fact that he's worked out how to climb on to the kitchen table. Meal times are chaotic enough with four children under 13, but if you add the fact that a dog may leap on the table at any second and piss on your chips, they've become unmanageable.

Unfortunately, disciplining Leo in any shape or form is verboten. I've buried my head in various owners' manuals in the hope of learning how to house-train him, and the modern method, as with raising children, is to praise them for good behaviour rather than punish them for bad. Apparently, if you give them a clout on the nose after an 'accident', there's a risk they may think that doing their business anywhere is bad, not just on the kitchen table, and subsequently make every effort to lick it up or — worse — start eating it. So the recommendation is to reward him with an expensive meat-flavoured pellet when he goes to the lavatory in the garden. Needless to say, this method is totally ineffective. After defecating on the table, he now looks at me expectantly, hoping for a 'treat'.

Caroline has enlisted in 'puppy school' at the local church, but that hasn't proved very helpful. When she told her we'd bought a Vizsla, the trainer shook her head in disbelief.

'Have you owned dogs before?' she asked. When Caroline said no, the trainer almost fell off her stool.

'And you got a Vizsla?!?'

It was as if Caroline had turned up with a velociraptor.

There are some upsides. He's a very attractive animal — the sole reason Caroline chose this particular breed, obviously. He has short hair, so doesn't shed, and once housebroken should make a good family dog on account of the breed's loyalty and protectiveness.

In some corner of my mind, I also entertain the fantasy that having a dog will teach my children to be more responsible, although there's little evidence of that. When he does his 'table trick' they fall about with laughter and, to date, none of the little horrors has volunteered to take him for a walk. Their main contribution has been to wind him up into a frenzy of excitement, then disappear to watch television after the inevitable mishap.

The main benefit is that we will eventually come to look on him as a member of our brood, and one of the paradoxes of families is that the larger they become, the stronger your sense of attachment and belonging. A family unit that includes a dog feels more solid and dependable, somehow. There's also the fact that he'll never leave home. When seven-year-old Charlie follows the other three to university, Leo will remain behind. In my lonely old age, that will be a comfort.

*Toby Young is associate editor of The Spectator.*

MICHAEL HEATH

## The Battle FOR BRITAIN

### ALTERNATIVE COMEDIAN

ROGER'S CAREER AS A STAND-UP COMIC IS IN FREEFALL, AND HE HAS NO IDEA WHY.



## Spectator Sport

### Coe is a fine man... but his roasting is justified

Roger Alton

**S**o Smiley was right all along: the bloody Russians were the baddest of the bad. The Pound report on the epic scale of their state-sponsored doping and cheating in athletics was indeed seismic. It can't have come as that much of a surprise, though. In a remarkable investigation in July 2013, Martha Kelner and Nick Harris of the *Mail on Sunday* blew the lid on the whole cesspool of Russian corruption.

This was the headline: Drugs, bribery and the cover-up! Russian athletes—including those who robbed Brits of medals—'ordered to dope by coaches' and officials 'demanded cash to mask positive tests'. Pretty much what we got this week from Dick Pound, the gunslinging sheriff brought in to clean up the sport. But what a pity that athletics' governing body, the IAAF, hadn't felt like doing anything a bit earlier.

Its main job has been to say: 'Move along please, there's no story here.' After the *Sunday Times* revealed that suspicious blood samples had been taken from athletes, Sebastian Coe, then campaigning to become head of the IAAF, said it was 'a declaration of war on my sport'. Killing the



*Steve Cram told Radio 5 he had been complaining about Russian cheating since he was 17. 'And I'm 55 now'*

messenger the best policy, eh? I don't think so. Coe, a fine man of immense achievement, has now come in for a pretty justified roasting. He must be looking back nostalgically to the days when his toughest assignment was to be William Hague's judo partner. His IAAF predecessor Lamine Diack is now under investigation by French police after accusations of corruption over doping tests. Coe has described Diack as the 'spiritual leader' of athletics. Some spirit, some leader. Coe needs to use his (record-breaking) levels of determination and discipline to get this straightened out.

Russia should be kicked out of Rio, if not banned from all competition until it gets its house in order. That will not be so easy: the country has hosted innumerable global events and is at the heart of world sports politics. Steve Cram told 5 Live the other day he had been complaining about Russian cheating since he was 17. 'And I'm 55 now.' That's a long time to be banging on about something with nobody much listening. And Russia is the tip of the iceberg. There should be another Pound operation in, say, Kenya and one or two other countries. Morocco perhaps.

Coe has wanted to lead athletics for years and is determined to get the sport back into the mainstream, as it was in his day. The World Championships in Beijing in August were a wonderful celebration of the sport. But how clean were they? Who knows now? Anyone who cares about the sport must pray that this won't be too

much for Coe. But I don't buy into all the hysteria about 'the greatest crisis sport has ever faced'. Bigger than in AD 393 when the Christian emperor Theodosius, banned the Olympic Games for being pagan? And banned they stayed for 1,500 years or so. There's a proper sporting crisis for you.

The fact is that man has always cheated—it's part of being human. But that is no reason to stop doing anything about it. Perhaps the best thing to happen in sport this year is the spate of Fifa arrests. Wizened autocrats being charged and, hopefully, banged up should change a few habits. The crucial force here was the Americans, who don't take kindly to corruption in their own backyard. Until anyone can get totalitarian states like Russia to take the same approach, things are unlikely to get better. But here's where it can: the cyclist Chris Froome is a shining example of what one sport can look like after its rulers have taken a rigorous approach to cleaning it up.

So Slammin' Sam will slam no more, at least not on the rugby union fields of England. Sad, I say. He was picked too early. Four more years to learn the game and he would have been as devastating as Sonny Bill Williams. English rugby need players who can run and pass, not stick it up the jumper. It looks like he was homesick too: getting lots of flak can increase homesickness (ask any prep school boy). Still, enjoy the Sydney sunshine Sam. We will miss you.

#### DEAR MARY YOUR PROBLEMS SOLVED



Q. The other night, as I arrived at the John James exhibition on Fulham Road, I stopped to say hello to an old friend standing outside. We had exchanged only a few words when the man next to him suddenly addressed me in sneering tones: 'Are you having a senior moment?' It is true I had failed to recognise him, though he was once very handsome and I had attended his wedding, but I hadn't seen him in the 20 intervening years, during

which time he had gone grey and even grown a grey beard and moustache. How would you have responded to this rudeness, Mary? Don't you agree that he struck the wrong note with this sort of accusatory approach towards someone who was just going into a party?

— T.D., London W12

*A. No reprimand was appropriate. This man was projecting anxiety about his own appearance. You should have turned the other cheek and cheered him up by replying: 'Yes, you're right, I was having a senior moment. I could have sworn you were George Clooney!' (Or substitute the name of another glamorous ageing film star to whom the bearded one has even the faintest resemblance.)*

Q. I have signed up with the Telephone Preference Service but still get about five calls a day on my landline from cold callers and assorted smooth-talking criminals trying to get my bank details, all treating me as though I am very stupid and trying to con me. I hate the invasion of my home and I hate losing my temper five times a day and being snappy with genuine friends who ring up. Is there anything I can do to put a stop to this?

— R.M., London SW6

*A. The Telephone Preference Service can control only those calls originating in the UK. Another reader has had great success with the following method. He picks up the telephone and, speaking in faintly robotic tones,*

*says: 'Hello. I'm either not here or I'm pretending not to be here. Please leave a message.' The criminals hang up immediately. The friends are familiar with the tactic and for those who aren't, as soon as they speak he interrupts and admits he is there after all.*

Q. Re. the difficulty of persuading dinner party guests to leave at a reasonable hour (Dear Mary, 31 October), my father had two formulae. He would clasp his hands and say loudly: 'So there we are!' If that didn't work he would follow up: 'Like all good things...' It was very effective. — M.B., by email

*A. Thank you for submitting this suggestion, which could be effective in the right company.*

# Food

## Dining by numbers

### Tanya Gold



Forty-five Jermyn St lives in the left-hand buttock of Fortnum & Mason (F&M), a shop whose acronym is slightly too close to FGM (female genital mutilation) for this column to be able to relax there for long periods, even though its Diamond Jubilee Tea Salon is excellent. Its name is part of a vogue for naming restaurants after postal addresses, and even street numbers (Richard Caring's 34 in Mayfair). This is one of the more idiotic, if less gritty, consequences of the London housing crisis: an address — or even a house number — is a brand. The restaurant named after a postcode — and I suggest TW11 0BA in Teddington because there is nothing there — is surely pending. Go for brunch, lick the bricks, adopt a refugee.

45 Jermyn St — 'old-school glamour meets contemporary London' — used to be called The Fountain. This restaurant seemed to be composed entirely of flounces and it suited F&M, a peculiarly British palace of dreams that sells heritage relish across the globe. But like an ageing

showgirl who married a duke, the Fountain had to be put down. Her flounces carried the tears of boys off to boarding school to lose their childhoods overnight; she smelt of lavender, talcum powder and Harold Macmillan. Did the tiny David Cameron come here, fill his tuck box, re-arrange his tiny face into a tiny smile?

I can't type the name again because it makes me feel stupid, or like a postman. So I will say it is a bright and spacious brasserie in sage and orange, principally Art Deco, but lying down for a rest. It is a very chic Oslo Court, ripped up and reconvened: the bones are old, the eyeballs — and skin — are new. The customers, despite the rebranding, are still ageing, international (Jews and Arabs, temporarily at peace due to the soothing proximity of food), soft in face and the sort of rich that does not care what it looks like; that is, very rich.

You can redecorate a restaurant, but you cannot redecorate a clientele. That would be rude

tele; that would be rude. In this F&M is powerless; they could fit comfortably into the waiting room at the London Clinic and look no less happy. There is a soft buzz of pleasure in this restaurant, just three days old. F&M was partially founded by a footman to Queen Anne ('F') and it has always had the gift of creating ease in hell. (She had a bad life, Anne — seven miscarriages, five stillborn babies, five dead babies.) It is the retail equivalent of the novels of Frances Hodgson Burnett, who argued convincingly that urban Victorian life was not that bad, if you were really very rich. It also invented the Scotch egg.

The prices, in this spirit, are immense. The caviar trolley sells Iranian Beluga for £6.70 a gram, with a minimum spend of £67 (scrambled eggs and baked new potatoes included). Dover sole à la meunière is £36.50 without veg. Glenarm Estate rib steak is £33.50, likewise without veg. I do not think the customers mind the expense; for them it is soothing, if the food holds up, which it does.

We eat a wonderful Welsh rarebit, heaving with salt and fat, and dark sticky salmon with soda bread. The sole is boned at the table, with deft expertise, by a waiter who behaves like a cardiac surgeon fallen to fish. Pudding is less good — the chocolate cake is an alcoholic, and would take us all with it — but otherwise all is fine. The Fountain has died; the world, oblivious, turns.

45 Jermyn St, London SW1 6DN,  
tel: 020 7205 4545.

#### MIND YOUR LANGUAGE

##### Female

'More deadly than the male,' said my husband archly. He was knowingly quoting Kipling, though I don't know why he should, since Kipling was not fashionable when he was young.

His cue was a remark he overheard from an academic former colleague puzzled by the frequency of *female* in student essays, where *woman* might have been expected. This usage is said to be 'now commonly avoided by good writers, except with contemptuous implication', said the *Oxford English Dictionary* in 1895, when it got round to considering words beginning with F. It had not always been



deprecative, for, more than 600 years ago, with no intention of being rude, old John Wyclif wrote (echoing the reference to the end of the world in Matthew 24: 41): 'Two femalis shulen be grynding at a queerne.'

By the nature of things, *female* was often contrasted with *male*. 'Saturne did onely eate up his male-children, not his females,' remarked a strange clergyman called John Gaule in the whirling words of his *Mag-astro-mancer* of

1652, a tract against astrological divination. It is not that the word *female* is *male* with a prefix tacked on to it. *Male* comes from Latin *masculus*, itself a combination of the diminutive suffix *-culus* and the noun *mas*, of unknown origin. *Female* comes from Latin too, *femella*, from *femina* with the suffix *-ella*. *Femina* comes down from an old Indo-European base signifying 'to suck'.

There was a feeling in the 20th century that *female* applied more properly to animals and plants. This left it open to humorous employment. In one of his golfing stories, P.G. Wodehouse wrote: 'The Bingley-Perkins

combination, owing to some inspired work by the female of the species, managed to keep their lead.' Like my husband, he was, no doubt, making a literary reference to Kipling, but the phrase *female of the species* has been spotted in texts from a century or so earlier with no humorous intent.

But a frequent collocation put *female* together with a role presumed to be male: *female soldiers* (1621), *female doctor* (1733), *female professor* (1784) and *female prime minister* (1846). Now that we have had all those, it seems strange still to use *female* as though it still bore monstrous connotations. — *Dot Wordsworth*

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